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the  
Miracles of Christ.  
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# MEDITATIONS

ON THE

## MIRACLES OF CHRIST.

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BY THE

VERY REV. J. S. HOWSON, D.D.,  
DEAN OF CHESTER.

*FIRST SERIES.*


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## PREFACE.



 VERY slight glance at the pages of this volume will show the purpose for which it is written. It is simply a religious book, in which the Miracles of Christ are used for the encouragement and instruction of the Christian soul in the ways of God.

These Miracles are so recorded in Scripture as to illustrate, very forcibly, the operation of Faith. In this illustration, too, there is the greatest possible variety. If the circumstances of these occasions are looked into closely, it will be found that no two of them are alike, or nearly alike. Thus they have a singular power of adaptation to the exigencies

of separate souls. And those especially who feel themselves alone, who are conscious of sorrows and difficulties which others do not share, whose case, if not really peculiar, yet seems so to them, may often find comfort and strength in a close study of the narratives of our Lord's Miracles.

Hardly any attempt is made in this volume to deal with Miracles in their connection with physical laws, or to determine their exact place in the general aggregate of the Evidences of Christianity. Should a second series of papers on the same subject be called for—and there is ample material for this in the Miracles which are untouched in this volume—the writer will endeavour, so far as he possesses the requisite ability and knowledge, to keep this side of the question carefully in view.

It should be noted, however, that in proportion as it can be shown that the Miracles as


recorded in the New Testament, are easily made subservient, under very various circumstances, to spiritual good, this adaptation is itself, indirectly, a forcible proof of the Divine origin of the Gospel. Christianity is not a mere revelation from Heaven, attested by wonders, and designed to give us religious information. It is a system for the recovery and rebuilding of the soul: and if the Miracles are not simply credentials of the revelation, but actually part of the system itself, they rise, even as attestations, to a much higher level than they would otherwise occupy.

J. S. H.

CHESTER:

*September 11th, 1871.*





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I.

THE GADARENES AND THE DEMONIAK

“Return to thine own house, and shew how great things God hath done unto thee.”

LUKE viii. 39.



## I.

### THE GADARENES AND THE DEMONIAK.



THE covenant of Moses was a covenant of the Law unto condemnation. The covenant of Christ is one of Grace unto salvation. Moses says: "Do this and live." We find that we cannot do this, and that we must seek for life in some other way. Christ says: "I am your life—I have fulfilled the law—believe in me and be saved."

And the miracles worked by Moses and by Christ are as types and shadows of the respective characters of these two covenants. When Moses brought the people out of Egypt, it was a time of terrible and destructive wonders; he had turned the water into blood—hailstones and lightnings had made

all Egypt desolate—and the Israelites came forth from the midst of noisome plagues, lamentation and death. But when Jesus came, it was a day of peace. “The beginning of his miracles” was to change the water into wine—He turned the storm into a great calm—He healed the leper—He raised the dead and restored to the mother her first-born, her only son. “The Law was given by Moses: but Grace and Truth came by Jesus Christ.”

This typical and representative character of our Saviour’s miracles has always been a fruitful source of comfort and a favourite object of contemplation to the religious mind. From the wonders that were done by Him in those three years of His earthly ministry, assurances of peace and supplies of strength have been drawn in all ages of the Church; and so it will continue to be, till He comes the second time to heal for ever, among His true people, all manner of sorrow and disease and sin.

These thoughts are obviously a suitable introduction to a series of “Meditations on the Miracles of Christ;” and we may con-

nect them, in the first instance, with two works of healing which took place on the two opposite sides of the Sea of Tiberias. One of these occasions I take for the subject of this paper. The other I reserve for the next. Both of them were miracles of mercy, wrought under circumstances full of encouragement to ourselves. In each case there is a solitary sufferer, who receives a blessing in the midst of an excited and unsympathising crowd. Thus both occasions convey the same assurance—an assurance very necessary for our peace and comfort—and not less so for our steadfastness and progress in the ways of God. I mean this: that, in the midst of all the distractions of the world, Christ looks with undistracted attention upon each one of His faithful followers. He sees each of them separately, and loves them each, as much as if no one else existed in the world but that one. His blessing is certainly with them, though they may have had much conflict at the first, and though they may have much to discourage them now. His gracious eye singles them out from the midst of the crowd, though they may feel or fancy themselves

neglected by all men, and their hearts may have been utterly failing them for fear.

But let us see what circumstances were introductory to that part of the first of these transactions, in which this particular lesson is to be found. We shall discover that they have some bearing on the remarks with which I began.

Jesus had shortly before crossed the Sea of Tiberias, from Galilee, to that part which is over against it, and which is termed by St. Mark and St. Luke the country of the Gadarenes. There, just as He landed, He was met by a furious demoniac, or a man possessed and tormented by a multitude of evil spirits. Their name, as they themselves were constrained to say, was "Legion." We need not, on this occasion, plunge into the mysterious subject of demoniac possession. It may suffice here to make three simple remarks. The first may have reference to the vast number of these evil spirits. This was a great aggravation of the wretched man's distraction and misery; and thus, too, we sometimes see a man possessed, subdued, and torn this way and that, by a legion—or

army, as we might say—of sins; so incessant and so various is the wickedness he commits. But again, the peculiar form of this possession was a hideous manifestation of the power of evil. There is nothing within our own knowledge to which we can compare it, but the most frightful religious lunacy, when the mind is haunted with horrible images, and all self-command utterly lost. And, thirdly, we must see here something more than the physical and mental facts that have come within the range of our own knowledge. The personal existence and awful agency of evil spirits were evidently at this period made peculiarly manifest, that they might be the occasion of showing Christ's supreme power, both to set free and to bind. "The keys of hell are in his hand." This distracted and wretched man was healed. The power of Christ relieved him entirely from the dominion of the enemies who had made him a misery to himself and a terror to all around him. This deliverance is our main subject; but first, a word may be said on the strange and awful circumstances which environ it.



These evil spirits, knowing Jesus well, knowing too their own misery, and having, as it seems, some anticipation of their own final doom, “besought him that he would not command them to go into the deep.” They desired not yet to be cast into that deep and dark abyss, where the devils are to be shut up by Him, in whose hand is the key. And that permission, which both in its origin and its continuance is utterly mysterious to us, was continued for some time longer.

It is of course known to most readers, but still it may be useful to repeat it for the reminding of some, that this particular sentence is often misunderstood, the word “deep” being wrongly supposed to refer to the waters of the lake. The request of the evil spirits corresponds in truth with what had been said above: “I beseech thee, torment me not; torment me not before the time.” This legion — this army — of Satan’s soldiers wished to remain where they were, and not yet to return to that pit of misery, from whence by God’s mysterious permission they had come — sent forth by the Evil One, like

Roman legions sent out by the emperors to conquer or to keep a province.

So far, Jesus consented. The time was not yet come when they were to be cast down "to hell and delivered into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment." But He would not permit them longer to exercise their dread dominion over man; and this, it seems, they were well aware of, when they made to Him their next request.

On a hill-side, at some distance, a herd of swine was feeding above the lake. Into these beasts "they besought him that they might be allowed to enter. And he suffered them." It is not said that He sent them, but He permitted them to go. He "gave them leave," as we find it in St. Mark. The instant consequence was destruction to the swine themselves, with loss to their owners. These creatures, seized with fury, and losing all instinct of self-preservation, suddenly rushed down the precipice with frantic haste; and all of them—St. Mark says there were "about two thousand"—perished in the waters. As a good angel once caused a dumb animal "with man's voice" to rebuke

the "madness" of a faithless prophet, so a legion of evil spirits urge dumb animals to their destruction, that they might rebuke a faithless people, who could wonder and fear, but would not receive Christ. It may be, too, that there was the design of punishing them for disobedience, of which they were well aware, inasmuch as swine were to the Jews unclean animals, and unlawful for them to eat. Certainly no proof could be more visibly and forcibly given to the poor possessed man, and to others, than this tranference of demoniac possession from himself to the brutes; while to all who should hereafter read the Gospels, a permanent admonition is here given of the destructive and degrading power of the invisible ministers of evil, with a salutary shock and revolting of the mind in connection with the thought of sin.

Every one can see very plainly that however simple and obvious some of the moral lessons of this miracle may be, many difficult questions might arise from the consideration of every part of it. To attempt the examination of the whole, unless we could devote to

it a large space, would clearly be useless. But one difficulty may just be noticed, before we pass on to consider that which is our principal point, namely, the position of the healed demoniac among the crowd of Gadarenes. And here is the connection of this special instance with those remarks concerning the general aspect of the miracles of Jesus, which I made at the beginning.

Some have found it hard to reconcile this miracle with the gentleness and goodness of our Saviour's character. It seems, however, strange that this difficulty should be felt. Rather we might have thought that it would have seemed natural to find here a proof of His love and mercy. Instead of being an exception to the general rule, which has been laid down, this occurrence is really an illustration of that rule, and may with justice be used to exemplify the contrast between Moses and Christ.

The consequences of rejecting Christ's mercy and despising Christ's love, are as much a part of His Revelation as are the blessings which it is His wish to bestow; and they require to be brought with equal

plainness before men's attention, if they are to know the whole truth "as it is in Jesus." And if His miracles do truly represent the general features of the Gospel dispensation, how were the results of unbelief and hypocrisy to be exhibited, except by some severe and destructive wonder? We find that our Redeemer has instructed us, by certain of His miracles, in the fatal ruin which will come on those who reject His salvation, or profess the Gospel without practising it. But which are those miracles? Two only of all His works of wonder were of a severe and alarming character; and of these, one was wrought by Him upon that which cannot suffer pain, upon a tree that grew by the road-side; and the other simply became the occasion of permitted harm done by evil spirits to a herd of dumb and unclean animals. Man, with all his sin and unbelief, was, under His ministry, the subject only of mercy. No false Pharisee ever left His presence, as Gehazi left Elisha's, "a leper white as snow;" no wild beasts ever came forth from the forest to tear those who made a mock of His teaching. He was contrasted,



too, in this respect, even with His apostles. He caused no Ananias and Sapphira to fall down in His presence and “give up the ghost,” nor any Elymas to be involved in “a mist and a darkness” for “perverting the righteous ways of the Lord.” When man was to read the lesson of the consequences of neglected opportunities, of rejection of the Gospel, of profession without practice, of the destructiveness of sin, of the power of evil spirits—he was to read it in the fig-tree, which withered up so soon on the way-side between Bethany and Jerusalem, or in the fate of that herd of swine, which ran down into the water and perished suddenly.

But let this suffice. We were to think, not of the difficulties connected with the miracle, or of the cavils of presumptuous men, but of him who was healed, and who remained with the blessing of Jesus Christ among those who “besought him that he would depart out of their coasts.” For this was the sad result of the miracle. When they that fed the swine saw what was done, they fled, and went and told it in the city and

in the country. The Gadarenes came out in great numbers to see what had taken place: they beheld him, out of whom the devils were departed, sitting at the feet of Jesus, "clothed and in his right mind:" they heard, too, from those who had been eye-witnesses, by what means he that was possessed of the devils had been healed. But fear was the only feeling that resulted. Like "the devils" themselves, of whom St. James speaks, their faith only made them "tremble." The whole multitude of the country of the Gadarenes round about besought Him to depart from them. They came out as in a solemn deputation, to prefer to Him a formal request, that He would go and leave them. St. Matthew's words are: "Behold, *the whole city* came out to meet Jesus, and, when they saw him, they besought him that he would depart out of their coasts."

It is a very serious example of the fact that fear is a very poor principle, and very ineffectual for good, unless it is attended with something better than fear. We must not indeed underrate the value of this prin-

ciple. Fear has been the beginning of many a true conversion. But in such cases, it has been accompanied with some other latent power, which in due time comes out into active exercise. The difference may be illustrated by comparing the example of these Gadarenes with that of St. Peter by the shores of this same Sea of Tiberias. He too was once alarmed by the wonder-working power of Christ, and exclaimed: "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord." But in his case, along with the sense of alarm, were the consciousness of sin, the admiration of Christ's holiness, the desire of pardon, the devotion to his Master. "He that feareth," indeed, "is not made perfect in love." But when love is present with fear, the result is very different from that which we see here among the Gadarenes.

There was, however, one among this crowd of people, whose feelings were very different from theirs. Great must have been the gratitude of him who had been healed and restored to his right powers, after such a fearful misery of body and mind. Hardly anything can be imagined more miserable

than this consciousness of madness, without the power to resist. The change must have been like the passing away of a horrible dream. His was now "the sober certainty of waking bliss."

Yet great, at the same time, must have been his distress at the thought of being left alone among a multitude whose only wish was to drive away that Friend to whom he owed so much. He was out of sympathy with those around him, and, so far as we can see, quite alone in the crowd. When he saw Jesus going up into the ship and preparing to cross over the lake again, he naturally besought Him that he might be with Him. But Jesus knew what was best for him. He sent him away, saying, "Return to thine own house, and show how great things God hath done for thee." As if He had said: "Thou mayst not follow me now: thou shalt be a witness to me among those that believe not; but I am with thee; my grace is sufficient for thee: remain in peace." So Jesus left him, alone among unbelievers. This was one of the crowds to which allusion was made at the beginning of these remarks.

This was one of the solitary persons, who, in the midst of the crowd, was the object of Christ's peculiar care.

Now let us think of these things with application to ourselves. And may God by His Holy Spirit make that application effectual, so that some good may result from the observations which follow! And first a word on the healed demoniac: then a word on the crowd among whom he was left alone.

There are many true Christians who feel keenly the absence of sympathy in those around them. They care for Christ, they are conscious of His goodness, they desire a more intimate sense of His presence; but those among whom their life is spent are only anxious that every thought of the nearness of Christ should be removed as far as possible. In such circumstances the value is felt of that assurance which, as was remarked above, these two narratives in the eighth chapter of St. Luke supply—namely, that the individual sympathy of Christ is with each one of His faithful followers: that He looks with undistracted care on each, amid all the distractions of the world. You

may be like him that was left among the Gadarenes—left there alone, with the love of Christ in his heart, amid those who had besought Him to depart from them. But Christ has placed you where you are; He does not forget you; and, if you are indeed His true servant, His blessing rests upon you. You may be ready to exclaim, in the words of the hundred and twentieth Psalm, “Wo is me, that I am constrained to dwell with Mesech, and to have my habitation among the tents of Kedar;” but look at the Psalm which follows next, and you will see that “He that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep—that the Lord shall preserve them from all evil—shall keep thy soul—shall preserve thy going out and thy coming in—from this time forth, for evermore.”

But more than this: He has given you His work to do, wherever you are. You are to testify to those around you, how great things God hath done for you. There is real strength and support in being conscious of such a commission: and you ought to be conscious of it, if you are conscious of the blessings which Christ has conferred on your

soul. Seek to cheer your loneliness by doing good to all with whom you come in contact. Let them see how thankful you are—how much changed you are for the better—how much happier you are—and how much more able than you used to be, to contribute to the happiness of others.

But there are some for whom the application of this history must be made, not from the healed demoniac, but from the crowd of unbelieving Gadarenes. With him the blessing remained sure; but they rejected Christ, and besought Him to depart. The difference between Him and them supplies a sure test, which will enable us to draw from the passage the instruction which fits our own case.

Do you desire the presence of Christ, or should you prefer His absence? If the latter is your condition, then this passage of Gospel history says two things to you very distinctly.

First there is the formidable reality of the powers of evil in the destruction of the soul, and the sure ruin which is the consequence of sin. This lesson, indeed, is taught most tenderly, and, as it were, reluctantly, in the miracles of Christ, and only because it is

absolutely necessary that we should learn it. Only in two miracles, and those not connected with the infliction of suffering on man, is this admonition given ; but there it is given most clearly. If we lead a barren and unprofitable life, a life of carelessness and indifference and neglect, the end must be a shrivelled-up and utterly dead condition, and barrenness for ever ; while a coarser and still more shameless life has its terrible warning in the miracle before us—in the power which evil spirits have, if God should withdraw His restraining hand, and permit that power to be exercised to the full.

But still let us end with thoughts of hope and encouragement. This miracle proclaims also the perfect mastery of that restraining hand over the worst of evil spirits, even though their name should be Legion. The crowd of the Gadarenes had both the warning and the encouragement left among them, to call them to repentance and to win them to faith. And we have the same. Whether any good results ensued among them afterwards, we do not know. They had their day. We have ours.



## II.

THE WOMAN HEALED BY THE WAY.

“Somebody hath touched me: for I perceiue that  
virtue is gone out of me.”

LUKE viii. 46.

## II.

### THE WOMAN HEALED BY THE WAY.



OUR subjects for two successive meditations are scenes from the two opposite sides—first the Eastern side and now the Western—of the Lake of Genesaret. Both exhibit to us wonders of healing, worked by our Lord and Saviour. In both cases a solitary sufferer receives blessing in the midst of an unsympathising crowd. Thus both miracles speak to us the same word of comfort. Both tell us that the eye of Christ is on the individual soul—knowing all its sufferings—undisturbed by the multitude around—ready to heal, when nothing else can help—ready with the most watchful and tender care, when all the world is neglectful or even hostile.

We have left, in the country of the Gadarenes, the man who had been made miserable by a multitude of evil spirits, now healed by Christ and “in his right mind.” The Gadarenes had desired Jesus to depart from them; and He had gone, leaving them without the blessing of His immediate presence; but leaving *him* as a witness in the midst of unbelievers. This was one of the crowds, of which we read in this part of the chapter, and one of the solitary persons, who, in the midst of the crowd, was the object of Christ’s special care.

Now Christ has crossed to the other side of the lake. Immediately we are introduced to another busy and restless scene. There was a difference here—at least a superficial difference—between the people on this shore and the other. Here the people “received him gladly.” They were all waiting for Him; and they hurried down, apparently, to the edge of the water, impatient for the moment when the bow of the boat should touch the shore.

When one among them, Jairus by name, the ruler of the synagogue at Capernaum,

pressed eagerly up to Jesus, and besought Him that He would come and heal his daughter, they followed Him in great numbers. They pressed and "thronged" Him. This was the other crowd—different, as we have seen, at first sight, from the former crowd on the further side of the lake—but perhaps no better in reality—no better in its inward character, and less sincere in its outward profession.

But among this pressing, chafing multitude, there was one timid sufferer, conscious of her misery, and with some degree of faith in Jesus—one who sought Him for herself, and came close to Him, and was blessed. Upon her it is that our attention is now to be fixed—not upon that crowd that is pressing and thronging, and the much people that is following, eager with all a crowd's curiosity to see what will come of this request of the ruler of the synagogue,—but upon that solitary woman—that poor sickly creature—languid with the sickness of many years,—who hears nothing of the confused voices and hot close footsteps of the crowd. Her eye is fastened upon the blue fringe of His garment,

which moves before her as He moves. She says within herself: "If I may but touch His clothes, I shall be whole." She comes behind Him in the press—she touches Him—and is healed.

And now, while you are looking at her, and see the sudden change which comes over her countenance, and observe how Jesus is turning to seek for her, while she has shrunk back into the multitude, bewildered with fear and the sense of that sudden health she feels in her frame,—and the people are impatient at the delay,—and Peter is half ready to rebuke his Master—I would ask you to consider two things, first, how long she had been sick without hope of relief; and then, how immediately she is healed, when she touches Christ.

I. She had been sick for many years. The three Evangelists who give the narrative of this miracle—St. Matthew, St. Mark, and St. Luke—are all express as to the exact time—"twelve years;" a long while for an illness to last. All that time her health had been sinking—her strength failing. She had tried various physicians. She had spent "all

her living" upon them. St. Mark says that "she had suffered much from many physicians." The remedies they had tried had been painful remedies: and yet they had been in vain: they gave her no relief: as the same Evangelist tells us, "she rather grew worse." She was worse rather than better, though during twelve years she had been applying to all the physicians she could hear of, and had tried all remedies, however painful, and at last had spent "all her living"—not much perhaps—but still all that she had. A poor woman among ourselves, with an illness upon her for years,—feeling every month that she gains no strength—unable to earn anything for her children—trying one physician after another, and suffering much in the hands of each of them—obliged to part with one little article of furniture after another, to pay for the medicines which have done her no good—and after twelve years growing rather worse than better,—it is a case which sometimes occurs—oftener perhaps than we imagine (for we do not know so much of the poor as we ought to do)—but it is a very wretched case, and one which

would move the pity of all the neighbours who might be acquainted with it, rich and poor.

But, wretched as it is, it is not at all an exaggerated picture of the spiritual helplessness of fallen man. Perhaps there are some of my readers who know the truth of this from their own experience. You may have felt that dull aching pain of mind,—that misery of restless and uneasy thoughts,—those sharp pangs of a guilty conscience,—those sudden starts of fear,—which are among the symptoms of the disease of sin. You may have felt them for years, and without being able to find any relief. You may have consulted many physicians,—and all their remedies may have given you nothing but additional pain: and now, after you have tried everything, you may find that, while you have no means of devising any new relief, you are worse rather than better.

The first physician, perhaps, whom you consulted was *Worldly Amusement*. He received you with many smiles,—gave you much encouragement,—tried to persuade you that your disease was not so bad as you had



feared,—prescribed to you pleasant remedies, —and recommended you to give yourself more freely to the entertainments of society. But you have found that he was a deceiver. The remedies, which seemed so sweet at first, became bitter as gall, when you had swallowed them. The society, which promised so much, was worse than solitude. And so it always is with a conscience that knows its own disease. Never will you find peace, till you love the bitterness of repentance more than the sweetness of earthly pleasure,—till you learn to forget the voices and the moving footsteps of the much people that is around you, and to fix your eyes on the border of the garment of Christ.

But you may have consulted another physician in the same neighbourhood, *Worldly Occupation*. And here you found advice of a more deliberate kind. And at first you thought you obtained relief through the regular exercise and uniform diet you were recommended to adopt. But still you found that you were not healed; the nature of your malady had been quite mistaken:—and though it seemed to be alleviated for a time,

it was only preparing to break out more painfully than ever. And it is a great mistake, if we think to cure the wounds of conscience in the pursuit of active business or adventurous enterprise. "There is no physician there" for the disease of sin. One earnest prayer to Christ would do more for us than years of anxious labour. One touch of the holy fringe would produce greater results than all the pressing and thronging of the uneasy crowd.

Did you go then to another physician, living in another street, and with a reputation quite different from the other? *Self-righteousness* is his name. He it is who writes these words, "Do your duty," on all his medicines. You found him a stern and uncompromising adviser. He told you that no time was to be lost, that you must begin at once with vigorous and decisive measures. And you have endeavoured to follow his advice, carefully and conscientiously; but all in vain. You have suffered as much from this physician as from the others that went before him. You find that you cannot do your duty, however much you try. Nor will

you find that the conscientious discharge of duty—if you trust to that simply—will ever cure the disease of sin. You will never obtain peace and real health till you learn to trust your case to Christ,—till you learn to look to Him for pardon and strength,—till you learn to love the very hem of His garment more than all the “filthy rags” of your own righteousness.

· II. But the second thing we were to think of was the sudden quickness of the sick woman’s cure,—how instantly she was healed when she touched Christ. “*Immediately,*” says St. Luke, “her issue of blood stanchèd,” or, as St. Mark says, still more emphatically, “Straightway the fountain of her blood was dried up; and she *felt* in her body that she was healed of that plague.” Here was no previous condition to be satisfied—no lingering hesitation—no long laborious delay. The disease was arrested immediately—the sickness of twelve years healed in an instant. There was but one momentary touch, and she felt at once that she was healed. *And He felt it too.* The forty-sixth verse is a very remarkable one. When Peter and they that

were with Him wondered that He should ask who touched Him, "Jesus said, Somebody hath touched me: for I perceive that virtue is gone out of me."

Learn from this the Almighty power of Jesus Christ in diseases of the soul. Learn that He can cure in an instant what has baffled the skill of all other physicians. And learn something more. Learn His willingness to heal you, His tenderness, His sympathy. He felt that virtue was gone out of Him. Learn, then, that He is willing to receive you, the moment you turn to Him with true and simple faith,—that He will feel for your case, as though it were something that affected Him—that He will not pass on His way as though He heeded you not,—but that He will turn round, as it were, so that He may speak to you words of peace and encouragement. We cannot believe less than this, surely, when we consider the suddenness of the cure, and His quick sensitive turning round to look for her that touched Him.

No doubt there is need of caution, when we give spiritual meanings to this miracle, as indeed to any of the miracles. We must

not allow ourselves to be so carried away by our imagination, as to treat them merely as though they were (if I may be allowed to use the expression) *dramatic allegories*—pictures, that is, in action of deep spiritual truths. They were real miracles, wrought to attest the Divine mission of Christ; and in this light they ought always primarily to be considered,—though indeed it has been well-proved, in the experience of the Church, that they all have a secondary application, or rather, many secondary applications; so that sick souls may find in them comfort and relief according to their several necessities.

Now, in considering this miracle as a miracle, we see at once an explanation of the suddenness of the cure. If it was to be an attestation of the Messiah's power and a proof that He was come from God, it must have been sudden. A gradual cure might have been no less really miraculous; but it would have contained no proof to those who were then present. In a few days that crowd would all have been dispersed; and by the time the woman was restored to health, not

one of them would have been near, to attest the restoration. That they themselves should be convinced—and that those too, who might read this narrative afterwards, should be convinced—it was needful that the cure should be perfect at once. To this ground of *evidence*—of necessary evidence—we are to refer the particular mention of the “twelve years,” during which the sick woman had been afflicted. It served to specify the case, like the mention of Jairus’s name, which occurs both in St. Mark and in St. Luke. Her hesitation for a time—her being called out of the crowd—and finally her “declaring *before all the people* for what cause she had touched him, and how she was healed immediately” all tended to the same result. It was like the saying of that man who was born blind, and whose healing is narrated by St. John:—“A man that is called Jesus made clay and anointed mine eyes, and said unto me, Go to the pool of Siloam and wash; and I went and washed and received sight.” Such works, thus attested, were, and are, the credentials of the Messiah. “The works which the Father hath given me

to finish, the same works that I do, bear witness of me that the Father hath sent me."

But further. There are *religious* reasons, why caution is necessary in the secondary application of this miracle. Some persons may be conscious that though they can fully sympathise with the sick and desolate woman, and though they have sought to touch the hem of Christ's garment with all the simplicity of a faith that has no other hope, and with a real confidence that He is as full of mercy as power,—yet they cannot *feel* with her that they are healed of their plague—they are far from experiencing perfect peace of conscience, and far from strong in resisting the power of sin. Are such persons to be cast down, because we think it necessary to lay great stress on the suddenness of the cure? Would not this be, perchance, to "make those sad, whom the Lord hath not made sad"? And who shall say how injurious might be the consequence of such discouragement? Or, on the other hand, by such interpretations we might lead other persons to suppose that the work of their

final salvation is to be done in an instant—that one momentary effort is to be made, and then the soul is to be at rest: and thus we might be guilty of “healing the hurt of God’s people slightly,” and leaving them with that worst—because most unnoticed—of all diseases, “peace where there is no peace.” Who that knows the deceitfulness of sin, and is “not ignorant” of the “devices” of Satan, but would shrink from the thought of contributing to such disastrous results?

But still (if these cautions are duly observed) we are not to throw aside the comfort which may be derived from the sudden perfection of the cure. The evil we are to avoid consists in trying to learn the *whole* of God’s Revelation from *one* passage—in trying to interpret *one* of the miracles so as to suit *all* cases of spiritual need. Rather we should consider them as separate applications of the truth for separate cases, and to be used as the Holy Spirit may make them helpful to the individual soul: even as the parables are not equally applicable to all persons, or to the same person at all



times. And this miracle we might, I think, compare in one respect with the parable of the Prodigal Son, where it is said "that when he arose and came to his father,—while he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion on him, and fell on his neck and kissed him." Less than this we cannot infer from the narrative before us, that Christ will receive us, the moment we turn to Him with a sense of our wretchedness, and with full purpose of heart,—that if we will cast away all our false physicians, He will freely pardon us, and begin immediately the healing of the long-continued disease of sinful habits,—and that we too shall feel the healing has begun,—shall feel that some new strength is given to us to resist temptation,—some hitherto untasted sweetness in the exercise of prayer—some unaccustomed fluency in the outpouring of praise—some increasing evidence that we are His, through "the Spirit that he hath given us."

The gift of absolute assurance is quite another thing. We cannot indeed be turned from the ways of sin into the ways of godli-

ness, without knowing that we are changed. If we avoid what we formerly delighted in, if we desire what formerly we were indifferent to, if we can resist temptations which formerly overcame us, we cannot but know that we are changed—that something has been done within our souls—that we are better and stronger than we used to be. Herein are those words true, “Whereas I was blind, now I see.” But to know that the work has been entirely accomplished—to know that the change which has been wrought in us is the change which makes salvation certain—to be able to say, with calm, unruffled assurance, “Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness,”—this is quite a different thing. Whereas the first is a persuasion, based upon evidence which may vary between a weak hope and a strong conviction, this is rather like a word spoken by Christ Himself directly to the soul, and bringing with it its own evidence. If I might speak on so high a subject, I would say that it corresponds with what we find in St. Mark’s account of this miracle, in his fifth chapter. It is said there, first, in the

twenty-ninth verse, that “she felt in her body that she was healed of that plague,”—she had proof, first, in her own experience of what Christ had done for her. But then, below, in the thirty-fourth verse, we find Him saying to her, *after* the cure had been wrought, “Daughter, thy faith hath made thee whole: *go in peace, and be whole of thy plague.*” The word was, as it were, a final sanction of what her own feelings had previously told her. Absolute assurance is when the soul hears from Christ the full ratification of that change, the *effects* of which have been felt before in our daily life.

This gift He grants or withholds according to His infinite wisdom. But of one thing we may be sure, that He feels what He does for us even more than we feel it ourselves. “Somebody hath touched me: for I perceive that virtue is gone out of me.” Let this verse bring us back, at the end of our meditation, to the thought with which we began,—namely, the individual sympathy of Christ with each one of His faithful followers, the undistracted care with which the Lord looks

upon each, amid all the distractions of the world.

In the preceding paper our subject was a single sufferer, to whom a blessing came, and with whom a blessing remained, in the midst of a crowd of unbelievers. Here the crowd makes a great profession of faith, but apparently with very little sincerity. You, too, may be, like this woman, in the midst of a crowd, where profession of allegiance to Christ is abundant, but where you may feel that there is but little sincerity. It may be that you exaggerate the want of sincerity—that you feel so deeply the bitterness of your own disease, that you do not take a just view of the condition of others. But still obtain comfort from this, that Christ, in the midst of the crowd, is conscious of the touch of your faith, and that He is already turning round to look upon you with the eye of His love.

And do not imagine—as sometimes we are apt to imagine in our seasons of despondency—that He reserves all His grace for others, and is forgetful of you. Jesus, it is true, was going to heal Jairus's daughter:

but this did not hinder Him from healing her who "touched" Him by the way. The "virtue" of His holy garments is never refused to the touch of faith. We read that on another occasion, a great multitude of people out of all Judæa and Jerusalem, and from the sea-coast of Tyre and Sidon, came to hear Him and to be healed—and that "there went virtue out of him and healed them all."

But with the comfort for some there must be admonition for others. So one word concerning the crowd itself may bring these reflections to a close, as was done before in reference to the further side of the lake. You may be as one of this other multitude, who thronged and pressed Jesus, while He was going to heal the daughter of Jairus. You may be a mere professor of religion, drawn among the followers of Christ by curiosity, or fashion, or the mere contagion of the example of those among whom you live. It is a common case. Oh! examine, examine yourself! And oh! let us all remember that it is not said of any of that crowd, that Jesus *felt* that they had touched

Him, though they were thronging and crowding round Him,—but only of her, who touched Him by the contact of a personal faith,—only of her it is said: “Somebody hath touched me: for I perceive that virtue is gone out of me.”

III.

THE GATE OF NAIN

“He delivered him to his mother.”

LUKE vii. 15.



### III.

#### THE GATE OF NAIN.



AIN was a small town of Galilee near the borders of Samaria. It is still called by the same name; and a traveller describes it as a "small hamlet inhabited at most by a few families." It was no doubt larger in the time of Christ; but there is no reason to believe that it ever was a place of particular importance. The word "city" in the English Bible often means nothing more than what we should call a large village, or a small country town. Nazareth, where the childhood of our Lord was spent, is called by St. Matthew a *city*; and the city of Nain—which was in the same neighbourhood—a little to the south—was most likely a place of the same kind.

It is scarcely mentioned at all by any ancient writer. We only know it as the scene of one of the wonderful works of our Lord and Saviour. But God has often chosen very ordinary spots for great events to happen there; and the Gate of Nain will always be famous, as long as the world endures, for the raising of the Widow's Son.

^ The *gate* of an ancient city was always an important part of it. Though such cities might not be towns of any great size, or contain any great number of inhabitants,—they were often built round by a strong wall, to protect them from the enemy in time of war, and from robbers in time of peace. This wall would have only one or two entrances or gates; and these would be closed at night, and watched, if necessary, by day. All those who went in and out of the city would have to pass through one of these gates. Thus people would often meet there—there would be much talking there—disputing—and telling of news. And besides this, the gate was the place of justice, and the place of merchandise. The judges sat in the gate—causes were tried there—mar-

kets were held there—the buyer and seller met in the gate. Thus we cannot be surprised that we find the gate of the city conspicuously mentioned in the Old Testament, and even in the New.

One occasion which would bring together a great many people to the gate, would be when there happened to be a *funeral*; and for this reason, that corpses were always buried outside the city. The tomb from which our Saviour rose was outside the gate. The burial-places in Palestine were often caves, or hollow places in the rocks, without the walls, the cities themselves being frequently built on rocky ground for the sake of safety. Such burying-places were common in all parts of Judæa and Galilee; and many of them are there to this day: and whenever they are found, we may be nearly sure that they were outside the city. It was not the custom to bury within the walls. Those who were carried to their last resting-place were carried through the gate; and they who might be standing about the gate, or coming in from the country, would be close to the funeral as it passed.

I have entered into these particulars that we may form to ourselves some notion of the kind of place it was where Jesus met the young man's funeral. "He was going into a city called Nain; and many of his disciples were with him, and much people. . . . And as he was coming nigh to the gate of the city, behold, there was a dead man carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow: and much people of the city was with her." Two crowds were approaching the City Gate at the same time—one from without, and the other from within. Jesus was on one of His journeys of love around the towns and villages of those parts, and a great company of disciples and others had collected round Him. And while they were coming in from the open country, the company of friends and neighbours, who felt for the widow's loss, and followed the dead body and the weeping mother, were coming out towards the place of burial; and the two crowds met at the City Gate.

Very few men can meet a funeral with indifference: and that man is little to be envied who can. Wherever we meet a funeral

—whether in the town or in the country—whether it is one of those great processions where the life of an eminent man is closed by a pompous and dismal ceremony—or whether some poor neglected being is carried to his cold grave, with two or three straggling attendants—spectators rather than mourners—the sight has a power over us which we cannot well resist. The voice of the world is hushed: and we seem to hear another voice which tells us that the world is vanity. We feel that we are in the presence of a great reality;—we feel that it is not wealth that we want—not reputation—not comfort—not the gratification of taste—not mere human love and sympathy—that we want,—but something better than any or than all of these. The impression does not last long, unless we take pains to meditate on the subject of death; but it is a serious impression while it lasts: and I think it must have been a serious moment,—perhaps a startling and breathless moment,—when the two crowds met at the Gate of Nain—the companions of Jesus, and the companions of the dead man and his widowed mother.

No doubt it was not an accident that so many people were brought together. That Divine Providence, which arranges all things,—all meetings and all partings,—so arranged the events that took place that day in Nain and its neighbourhood, that those two companies should meet at that particular time. A large concourse of people was thus brought together to see the work of the Messiah,—the solemnity and sympathetic feeling of the moment would tend to prepare their hearts for the religious lesson of this great occasion,—and a number of witnesses were provided to attest the truth of the miracle. All this was not accidental; and we are called to notice the result by the two last verses of the narrative: “There came a fear on all: and they glorified God, saying, That a great Prophet is risen up among us; and, That God hath visited his people. And this rumour of him went forth throughout all Judæa, and throughout all the region round about.”

But let us turn from the consideration of these two collections of people—and the impression which the miracle made on them

and what they said of God having visited His people—and the rumour which they spread through the country; and let us look more nearly at the miracle itself.

“When the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her, and said unto her, Weep not.” These simple words call our attention away from the multitude, and fix it upon Jesus and the widow. We forget those who were going out of the gate, and those who were coming in, and see only the solitary mourner, and the Prophet who suddenly spoke to her. They seem to convey the impression that His pity for the suffering widow was the motive of the work which He wrought. And indeed we need not doubt that it was so. This human sympathy for the particular sorrow of one individual mourner is in no way inconsistent with that Divine power which arranged all the circumstances of this great miracle, and knew all its consequences long before: though these are things which we cannot explain. They belong to the great mystery of “God manifest in the flesh.” If Jesus was indeed “flesh of our flesh,” can we wonder that He should thus be moved at the grief of her

whose husband had been taken away from her, and who was now following her only son to the grave? She was bowed down with one of the heaviest of all the sorrows which are found in this world of sorrow. A widow, who has children to care for and to be with her, is not left without consolation;—and if *one* among *many* children is removed, there is some hope that those who remain may supply the place of the one who is taken:—but when the widow has only one son, and when that son has grown up to manhood, and is cut off in the prime of his days—when the one solitary prop, on which she has rested the burden of her affections—when that too is cut away and gone—then she is a widow indeed. When God would describe by the mouth of His prophet, the deepest sorrow, the words are these: “O daughter of my people, gird thee with sackcloth, and wallow thyself in the ashes; make lamentation and bitter mourning, *as for thine only son.*” Can we wonder that He, whose heart was touched when He saw the multitudes as sheep without a shepherd, and found relief in tears at the grave of Lazarus,



—can we wonder that He should have been moved with compassion here at the sight of so much grief, that He should have stopped by the side of the bier, and said to the mother, “Weep not”?

He who wept, said to the mother, “Weep not!” They would be unnatural words in the mouth of any other comforter. No one who is acquainted with human nature, and who knows what sorrow is, would try to stop a widow’s tears at the grave of her only son. But He who came with words of unnatural comfort, came also with supernatural power. “He came and touched the bier, and they that bare him stood still.” He seems first to have addressed the mother, while the bearers were still proceeding with the body; and then He approached the bier and put forth His hand and touched it; and there was something in His presence which made the bearers immediately stand still. What a moment of breathless suspense—suspense between life and death! No one could doubt that death was there. It was visibly before them. They were carrying, not a coffin such as that in which we shall be buried, but an open bier, and the

body was stretched upon it, dressed out in funeral garments. There the young man lay, dead in the midst of the living. The hand of Jesus was put forth to touch the bier—the mother and the bearers were still—and the double crowd—those who had come with the widow out of the City Gate, and the companions of Jesus, with the dust of their journey on their feet—all stood round in silent expectation. “And Jesus said, Young man, I say unto thee, Arise. And he that was dead sat up, and began to speak. And he delivered him to his mother.”

Thus was death turned into life, and sorrow into joy, at the word of Christ. The history goes no further. What words of wonder and of gladness, of affection to his parent, and gratitude to his Deliverer, broke forth from the lips which had lately been closed in death,—we are not informed. But we are called on to notice the Evangelist’s concluding expression: “He delivered him to his mother.” “He *gave* him to his mother” is the literal translation. The widow receives her son as the free gift of that compassion which made the Saviour pause at the sight

of her grief. When God gives, He gives liberally; what God begins, He makes complete. The young man is not called to follow Christ, like Andrew and Peter from their nets by the water-side, like Matthew from the receipt of custom, or like the young inquirer who thought he could be righteous while he loved his riches. He is left at Nain to remain with his mother, to console her sorrows, to support her declining years. It is a touching lesson of domestic affection and filial duty, like the words which were spoken on a later and more solemn occasion—"Woman, behold thy son!" and to the disciple—"Behold thy mother!"

We have no means of completing the story of the widow and her son. He is left with his mother at Nain, as Lazarus was afterwards left with his sisters at Bethany,—to glorify the name of his great Deliverer, and to show forth His praise with his lips and in his life. Whatever he may have been before, we can hardly doubt that his restoration to his earthly life was made the beginning likewise of a new and spiritual life. He who could join again the soul and the body in

their mysterious relationship,—He who could make the blood grow warm in the veins,—who could restore to the muscles their strength, and to the nerves their delicate sensibility,—who could cause the young man's tongue to articulate the meaning of the mind, and his eye to look round upon the world again, and see the city where he was born, and to recognise the mother of his childhood,—it was no less easy for Him to restore the harmony which the *soul* had lost through *sin*,—to give sensibility to the conscience, and strength to weak resolutions,—to give spiritual vision to the darkened mind, and to put songs of thanksgiving into the renewed heart. “Whether is easier to say, Thy sins be forgiven thee, or to say, Arise and walk?” He who could raise the body from the funeral bier, could also raise the soul from the death of trespasses and sin.

There can be no doubt that these are some of the thoughts which we ought to carry away with us from the contemplation of this miracle. The miracle was worked for us as well as for those who saw it. That great Prophet which arose in Galilee has “visited”

other people also. His "rumour" is gone forth far beyond Judæa, and is spread throughout the world. And wherever His name has been made known, there have men been raised up from the death of sin to the life of righteousness. His power is not slackened, and His arm is not shortened, that it cannot save. "All power is given unto him in heaven and in earth," and "the keys of death and of hell" are in His hand.

But it is not so much the *power* of Christ, as the *love* of Christ, upon which this miracle invites us to dwell. And we are more apt to doubt His love than His power. We readily believe that He is exalted "high above all principalities and powers," and that He is made "the Head over all things to the Church:" but that He looks down from that high eminence, and sees our particular sorrows, our burdens, our difficulties, our temptations, and that He is ever near to help us "with his own right hand and with his holy arm,"—this is what repenting and anxious sinners are apt to doubt. If this be the case with you, whose eye is at present on this page, think of that particular

love which He showed in the miracle at the Gate of Nain. Think how He forgot all the crowd, and saw only the widow and her grief, and hastened to raise her son, and restored him to his mother. What He was then, He is now. His eye is not distracted by the bustle and confusion of the human crowd in which we live. All the heavy waves of sin and sorrow which have rolled over this miserable world since the day when He met the widow at Nain—all these dark waters have not quenched His love. He sees every heart where godly sorrow is producing its blessed effect, “working repentance not to be repented of;” and every such case is as much the object of His special care, as if there were none other in the whole world.

With so much power and so much love, what more do we need? One thing more is needful—that we be sensible of the deadly state in which sin has placed us. Sin is well compared in the Bible to death. For death does not know that it is death, and sin forgets that it is sin. How many are there amongst us who are like dead men—stretched on the bier of an insensible conscience—

carried out to be buried by sinful passions and worldly desires ! We must not suppose that all is right with us, because our minds are not disturbed. Death is very tranquil. The young man lay stretched upon the hard bier—calm and insensible—moving only when the bearers carried him. Had Christ not been there, they would have moved on without doubt to the grave. All the sympathy of his friends, all his mother's grief, were of no avail. Nothing woke him, nothing, nothing could have waked him, but the voice of Christ.

And the funeral is still moving on ; and Christ is for ever meeting it at the City Gate. And this meeting may even now be taking place in the case of some whom the writer is addressing through the eye. If even a suspicion that it is so,—if a dread of that long death, if a longing for a better life is, even for a moment, awakened within you—if even for a moment you would wish to be delivered from those sinful passions and worldly desires, which are carrying you to an eternal grave—do not hesitate. These short pauses in the soul, when the passions

are arrested in their course, are sometimes of infinite importance. They are sometimes the moment of suspense between life and death. Do not hesitate. The bearers stand still. The hand of Jesus Christ is on your bier. Cast aside the winding-sheet of sinful habits, and rise up, and behold that Saviour who stands so near you, and who says to you, as He has said to many: "Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and I will give thee life!"



IV.


THE GATE OF JERICHO.

“He of good comfort, rise; He calleth thee.”

MARK x. 49

## IV.

### THE GATE OF JERICHÖ.

HE last journey of our Lord to Jerusalem, just before the fatal Passover, was marked by circumstances of peculiar solemnity. It may be said to consist of two stages, divided by the pause which was made at Jericho: and in each of these stages we observe the manifestation of deep feeling, which harmonised sadly and seriously with the character of the time.

The starting-point of this journey was a place called Ephraim, whither Christ had retired soon after the raising of Lazarus from the dead. Proceeding from hence He called His disciples aside, and on the way gave a most exact and minute prophecy of His sufferings. He mentioned in order—the be-

trayal—the condemnation—the delivering to the Gentiles—the mocking—the spitting—the scourging—the death. And we feel how great an addition to our Saviour's sufferings must have resulted from His contemplating them thus definitely beforehand. At the same time we adore the heroic dignity, the perfect obedience, the gentleness and simplicity which marked that discourse with the disciples. And in harmony with this impression, we see the Lord, after the words have been spoken, preceding those disciples in the way towards Jerusalem—taking the lead, while they were following unwillingly, with minds perplexed and alarmed.

This was in the way from Ephraim to Jericho. The second stage of the journey was from Jericho up the steep road to Bethany; and up this road too we are expressly told, though by another Evangelist, that He bravely and calmly preceded the disciples, who were depressed by grief and fear. Bethany itself again, the last earthly resting-place, is in harmony with all that has gone before: for it is marked, more than any other scene in Scripture, as the home of

domestic sorrow and domestic love in connection with Christ.

Our present attention is limited to Jericho, the intermediate point between those two stages of that sorrowful and impressive journey.

Jericho has a great name in Bible history : and even the place deserves on our part some careful consideration, not only because of persons and events connected with it, but even in regard to its situation and appearance. We will pause for a moment first on this general topic.

This was the first city taken and occupied by the Israelites under Joshua, on their successful invasion of Palestine. Even then it must have been a place of striking beauty, for in the early part of the Old Testament we find it called the "city of palm-trees;" and a populous city among palm-trees must always be attractive to the eye and imagination. As to position, it was deep down below the lofty and bare "hill country" of Judæa, and built upon the edge of the rich alluvial plain of the Jordan, some considerable distance before the river enters the Dead

Sea ; while full in view opposite, as we look towards the East, is the long blue range of the mountains of Moab, from whence the Israelites came. Jericho, in this low position, had naturally a very warm climate ; and it is often almost summer there, when it is almost winter on the high ground above. We know, from the story of Peter warming himself at the fire, that the weather was very cold in Jerusalem at the time of the last Passover : but probably all was bright and sunny at Jericho, when Jesus was there a few weeks before, and the sycomores, like that into which Zacchæus climbed, already in full leaf.

The district round about was fertile and productive. For, besides the climate and favourable position, with the great river within a few miles, there are fountains rising from under the hills of Judæa—one connected with Elijah's name, another with Elisha's—the water of which was carried by artificial channels through the gardens and fields. "The water of Jericho" is a phrase to be particularly noticed in the Book of Joshua ; and water, in that hot country, is in truth

only another word for greenness and vegetation.

Moreover—to turn from what was provided by Nature to what was the work of human hands—in the period immediately before the birth of Christ, Jericho had been magnificently rebuilt by Herod the Great. It was one of his favourite residences. In fact, the concluding part of his life was spent there. For some ages previously it had been in a state of comparative desolation; but now it had been raised into a place of great importance again. Once more it was a populous and stately city among the palm-trees; and it carried on a large trade, not only in dates, the produce of those trees, but in the spices and fruits which were cultivated in its orchards. If we add that it was on more than one important thoroughfare, leading to Jerusalem, we see that, even on these grounds, it is not unnatural to dwell in thought on the fact of our Lord's stay—for the last time—in this city.

But there is not merely the attraction arising from situation and appearance, and from the large and thriving population, just

then occupied with thoughts of the Passover. There are other and deeper reasons for meditating with interest on our blessed Lord in connection with Jericho. For instance, here lived one of His virgin mother's own ancestors—a Canaanitish woman and a sinner. Rahab is the first woman mentioned on the entrance of the Israelites into the Promised Land; and her name is conspicuous in the Sacred Genealogy—reminding us that the Son of God, in our nature, has on the one hand healing for the very foulest sin, while on the other in Him also all national barriers and hindrances are broken down.

This seems to me a very striking and a very instructive association to keep in mind, when we are thinking of our Saviour's last sojourn in this place. And it is in harmony with the whole scene, and with all that we are told of His discourses and actions on that occasion. In this sacred presence of Jesus among the gardens and in the streets of Jericho, we see a token of the welcome He gives to sinners and the purity He offers to the Heathen world. Though Jericho was a Jewish city, still it contained large elements



of Gentile life also. In fact, wherever we come upon the mention of Herod and Herod's great cities, we know that we are at the point of contact between the Hebrew and Gentile worlds. Zacchæus, too, who is a prominent person on this occasion, may be taken to represent this same contact. He was a publican or tax-collector, in a place of large traffic and of political importance, under the Roman Government; while we know that these publicans were hated and despised among the Jews, and were indeed often men of the vilest character. Thus the very presence of Jesus in the house of Zacchæus reminds us of His forgiving and healing power—of His desire to bring all the scattered elements of the human race into union with Himself—of His readiness to receive all who come to Him, whatever their character may have been,—if only they do come.

But it is not these general views concerning the association of Jesus Christ with Jericho, which touch us most closely, or are most likely to profit us. We are to single out for close attention one particular event which took place on this occasion.

There was a blind man at the gate of Jericho, as Jesus passed. His name was Bartimæus. When we compare the four Gospels together, we find some difficulties as regards both the particular gate of the city, and the number of blind men that were healed. But these difficulties we may dismiss. The particular gate is of no consequence. And if there were two blind men, there certainly was one. I think it not quite impossible that there may have been three. However this may be, our attention is to be fixed on this one, Bartimæus. And perhaps our best course, on this occasion, will be to follow chiefly the narrative of St. Mark, because it is the most animated, and contains some of those smaller touches, which are as a frame to a picture, and supply great helps to our obtaining a distinct view of whatever narrative may be before us.

“They came to Jericho: and as Jesus went out of Jericho with his disciples and a great number of people, blind Bartimæus, the son of Timæus, sat by the highway side begging. And when he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to cry out, and say, Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy on

me. And many charged him that he should hold his peace : but he cried the more a great deal, 'Thou Son of David, have mercy on me.' These are St. Mark's words. Let us put the particulars of what we are told here, clearly before our minds.

There was evidently a great crowd moving with Jesus, as He went outwards on the road towards Jerusalem. The dust raised by many feet was among the sycamore and palm trees, and on Herod's great gateway and the houses in the suburbs. The crowd was caused, partly by the fact that large numbers were flocking along this great thoroughfare towards the Passover,—partly by the fact, that wherever Jesus went on His errands of mercy, multitudes followed Him. This blind man Bartimæus was in the habit of sitting there, by the highway side. Probably he sat there daily—from morning till evening—in darkness, while the sun shone bright on the trees overhead and on the dusty road. He knew that there was sympathy for the blind, and that many who passed in and out of the city would give something to relieve his wants. Levites and Priests on

this road between Jerusalem and Jericho might simply look at him and “pass by on the other side;” but there would always be some good Samaritans, with tender hearts and willing hands.

And now there was a sudden and unusual concourse. He heard, more and more, the crowding footsteps and the hum of busy voices. This excites his curiosity and hope. What could it be? St. Luke says that “hearing the multitudes pass by, he asked what it meant; and they told him that Jesus of Nazareth was passing by.” On this, a start of joyful surprise ran through his frame. He had heard of this “Jesus of Nazareth,” this “Son of David.” And now—delightful thought—this great Worker of miracles—this sympathising Friend of all who are in darkness and sorrow—was close to him also. His face as yet he could not see. But he might hope to hear His voice. And surely *He* at least—whatever others might do—would not refuse to hear his cry. And with eager voice he did cry—“Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy on me; Thou hast had mercy on others, have mercy on me. I am

blind, and they tell me that Thou art the Light of the World."

Such importunity was not welcome to certain of those who were thronging after Jesus. Some of them—our Evangelist says, "many," of them—charged him that he should hold his peace. How hollow-hearted are many of those who profess to be followers of Christ! How different they are from Christ Himself! How they dislike the interruption caused by sights and sounds of sorrow and distress! This is a thought which we may gather up for our own admonition, and for self-examination, by the way.

But this cold reception by certain members of the crowd was of no moment to Bartimæus. He knew that he was blind; and he hoped that Jesus was both able and willing to give him sight. Therefore he cried the more—"the more a great deal," says St. Mark very beautifully—"Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy on *me*." How true this is to nature! Who could expect to silence the supplicating voice of a blind man, conscious that, as regards one sense, the world is an utter blank to him, and believing that the power is

present that can turn this darkness into a glorious day?

And then follow two verses which continue St. Mark's narrative from the point where we left it. They seem to me to concentrate in themselves all the deep meaning and sweet encouragement of this miracle. "And Jesus stood still, and commanded him to be called. And they call the blind man, saying unto him, Be of good comfort, rise; he calleth thee. And he, casting away his garment, rose, and came to Jesus."

Three things are set before us here; and, first, "the standing still" of Jesus.

It is a very impressive moment—pointedly noted by all the three Evangelists who record the miracle—Jesus "stood"—"stood still." *He* did not think that cry an unwelcome interruption. "He commanded him to be called." It does not seem that Bartimæus heard that voice as yet, addressed to himself. The invitation was sent by others. St. Matthew says simply that Jesus "called him." St. Luke says that He "commanded him to be brought." St. Mark gives the very words of those who conveyed the invitation.

So now, secondly, there came encouragement from the crowd also. Some of them—hardly the same with those who had repelled and discouraged him—but some of them—obedient to Jesus, and glad to be the bearers of the invitation—“call the blind man, saying unto him, Be of good comfort, rise; he calleth thee.”

“Be of good comfort”—and he *was* of good comfort—for now, thirdly (though indeed all these things happened almost in a moment, and probably took less time than I am taking in the telling of them)—the blind man, in eager impatience, cast off his cumbrous outer garment, which was then, as it is now, a characteristic part of Oriental dress. It would have hindered the murderers, of whom we read in the Acts of the Apostles, in their stoning of Stephen. And it would have hindered Bartimæus in his eager desire to come instantly to Jesus. These smaller matters of ancient custom should always be remembered in reading the Bible history, for they help us to represent to ourselves its scenes more distinctly. And here again it is worth while to observe that only St. Mark

mentions this very simple and natural, but most expressive and dramatic, incident in the transaction—the casting off of the outer garment, as Bartimæus sprang from his seat, and hastened to the spot, when he heard the voice which told him that Jesus desired him to come.

We must glance now at the two remaining verses of the chapter. “Jesus answered and said unto him, What wilt thou that I should do unto thee? The blind man said unto him, Lord, that I might receive my sight. And Jesus said unto him, Go thy way; thy faith hath made thee whole. And immediately he received his sight, and followed Jesus in the way.”

What a proof is here, both of the sympathy and of the power of Christ! And what a living picture both of the operation and of the result of faith!

In the Epistle to the Hebrews, faith is described as “the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” And here, at the Gate of Jericho, is this principle represented in its actual working. Bartimæus had never *seen* Jesus. He *could* not



have seen Him hitherto, even if He had been standing before him. But his *heart* supplied the *evidence*. He believed, just as if he *had* seen. And what he *hoped* for was the passing away of his blindness, and the obtaining of the faculty of sight. And in hearing the voice of those who encouraged him with the command of Jesus, in casting away his garment and rising and going to the Saviour, he already grasped the *substance* of that for which he *hoped*. Thus in this transaction we behold the operation of faith, even more completely than it could have been described in words.

As to the result of faith, in a literal sense indeed *we* cannot understand the full joy of Bartimæus, for *we* have never been blind, *we* have never known that darkness everywhere, those weary days, that vacant night and nothingness, no human face, no world, no light. And therefore we cannot tell what it was to him, when the daylight came and he could see the faces of those whom he loved, and a world was revealed far more beautiful and wonderful than he had ever imagined. But looking to the religious side of the

transaction—and that is the important side—we see one part of the result, which does convey to our mind a very definite meaning. Bartimæus now *saw* Christ, and *followed* Christ.

So now we may pass to a practical application of the subject to ourselves: and the word “faith” is the hinge upon which our meditations may easily turn, from contemplating the world of outward visible miracles, to that inward spiritual world, which is the sphere of the wonder-working operations of grace. What our Saviour said at the Gate of Jericho concerning “faith” makes it quite evident that we are to gather from the narrative of this occurrence, not only a firm belief in regard to His Divine mission, but also some knowledge of the nature of that great inward change which He came to effect in our souls.

It seems as if each part of the narrative had its special and most precise instruction.

(i.) And, first, the *consciousness of blindness*. How dark is the soul of man, if left to itself, in matters of the most serious importance! What could we have known of such things,

unless God had made a revelation? And even now, when God *has* made a revelation, what a cloud there is still over the spiritual eye, unless some special help is given! There may be much enlightenment of another kind—sagacity in business—wide information on general subjects—and (with some few) there may be great literary or scientific attainment. But none of these things give real insight into the relations subsisting between the soul and God. Nay: *this* faculty is often the feeblest, when *those* faculties are the strongest. The first requisite of all, then, is that we be really conscious of this natural darkness of the soul. The healing is not far off, when we know that we are blind, and when we desire to see.

(ii.) Next, there must be the recognition of *Christ* as the one only source of spiritual light. It is He that “by coming into the world” has become the dayspring of “light to every man.” In Scripture He is set before us in many characters; and the right way to preach the Gospel to men is to tell them that Christ, to them, is *everything that they need*. Perhaps it is best to take one cha-

racter at a time. And this character, that He is "the Light of the World," is certainly made very prominent. The giving of sight to the blind was a most conspicuous part of His work. The present miracle is not by any means the only one of the kind which is recorded. Two blind men, at least, as we have seen, were healed at Jericho. St. Mark mentions the healing of another at Bethsaida. And it is in connection with one very signal instance at Jerusalem, related by St. John, that Jesus Christ uses that phrase of Himself—"I am the Light of the World." These miracles vary in the mode of their performance, and in the manifestation of their results; and such variations are instructive; for perhaps God never converts two souls exactly in the same manner. Here it is the instantaneous and complete nature of the cure that attracts our attention. At the word of Christ the sunrise broke at once into a glorious day.

(iii.) Another point of which we are reminded in this narrative is, that the soul, in coming to Christ, has often to encounter the discouragement arising from want of

sympathy. In the hard voices from the crowd, that would have imposed silence upon Bartimæus, I see the type of those cold calculating men of the world, who dislike to see other men in earnest in regard to religion. The warm enthusiasm of the soul in its coming to Christ is often sadly checked in this way. Perhaps some of those who read these pages may be exposed to a temptation, which is very dangerous to the soul, and of which this discouragement of Bartimæus may justly be taken as a type and representation. They may have felt and manifested some desire of the blessing which comes from Christ. They may have taken some steps to separate themselves from bad companions—may have begun to make some better and bolder use of means of grace:—but now they are exposed to ridicule, or at least to the discouragement arising from cold looks and unsympathising words. Such circumstances often constitute a crisis of the soul. Those who are feeling their need of Christ, and desiring to draw from Him spiritual light, should be very careful not to listen to those worldly advisers who en-

deavour to turn them from their design ; but to pray all the more—"the more a great deal." Bartimæus knew the value of his opportunity ; and he was determined not to let it pass, whatever the cold-hearted bystanders might say. Let Bartimæus be our example.

(iv.) But we must not forget that while some in the first instance repelled Bartimæus, others afterwards were full of consideration and kindness in pressing Christ's invitation upon him, and urging him to go. Thus we have an example from part of the crowd as well as from Bartimæus. And among the readers of this paper there must be many who do desire to be the instruments of conveying such loving messages from Christ, and to bring their fellow sinners to the only source of light and joy. Go, I would say, go still more diligently, to those of your brethren who are sitting in their darkness and longing for light ! Tell them, not simply that Jesus is passing by, in this busy crowd of human life, but that He is "standing still," and waiting to receive them ! Say, on your Master's behalf : "Be of good comfort, rise ; he calleth thee !"

(v.) And just two short remarks remain to be made, before we have learnt all the religious lessons of this occurrence at the gate of Jericho. The true *mode* of coming to Christ is described to us in this miracle. It consists in rising up at once—in throwing aside all hindrances—and going straight to Him—promptly—hopefully—without turning to the right or the left—and without hesitation. “Bartimæus, casting away his garment, rose, and came to Jesus.” The poor man made the best of his way to the Saviour, and cast aside everything that might be in danger of throwing him down, and might in any way hinder him or retard his motion. Similar to this is the history of a true conversion in the case of a human soul.

(vi.) Finally, there is one word for us still in the concluding sentence of the chapter. “Immediately he received his sight, and followed Jesus in the way.” This immediate following of Jesus shows how completely he was *cured*. He requires no one to lead him. His one sufficient guiding principle is gratitude to his Deliverer. “He followed Jesus.”

This sums up all. To be among those who follow Jesus Christ is all that we need desire. And yet there is one thing more in the sentence. "He followed him *in the way*." This again is one of St. Mark's additions. The way may be hot and weary and dusty; and grief and suffering may be in prospect: but still "the way is the way," and, if Christ goes before us, all is right. And He did precede His disciples with resolute courage, as we have seen—both before arriving from Ephraim at Jericho, and afterwards up the steep ascent towards Bethany and Jerusalem. May it be ours, with the disciples and Bartimæus, to follow Him "in the way!"



V.


WEAK FAITH AT CAPERNAUM.

“Sir, come down, ere my child die.”

JOHN iv. 49.

## V.

### WEAK FAITH AT CAPERNAUM.

 ONE of the best methods of obtaining a clear and intelligent perception of anything is to compare it with something else which seems like it, but is really different. When two apparently similar things are put side by side, so that we see their superficial resemblances, we then perceive, far more easily and distinctly than before, the points in which they are in fact distinguished.

I make this remark as a preliminary step towards our exact appreciation of the circumstances of one of our Lord's miracles. The degree of instruction which we obtain from the records of His acts of healing, depends very much on our careful notice of the pre-

cise particulars in each instance. It cannot be expected—and I imagine it is not intended—that we are to learn all that is to be learnt from these varied narratives, without careful study and attention. Thus any method which helps such study and attention should be gladly adopted.

Now there is another miracle recorded by the Evangelists, which at first sight is very similar to that of which the account is given in the fourth chapter of St. John. The resemblances, indeed, on a first careless view, are so close, that I believe some writers have contended that the two occasions were the same. In this notion I am persuaded that they are very much mistaken. The resemblances are, so to speak, accidental, and quite on the surface: the differences are deep and essential; and I think the reader will easily join me in this conclusion if he will follow me while I give the narratives at length.

The first of them is contained in the concluding verses of this fourth chapter of St. John. The scene is Galilee. It is, in fact, he informs us, “the second miracle which Jesus did, when he was come out of

Judæa into Galilee.” We are told in the forty-sixth verse that Jesus “came again into Cana of Galilee, where he made the water wine;” and then the history proceeds as follows:—“There was a certain nobleman, whose son was sick at Capernaum. When he heard that Jesus was come out of Judæa into Galilee, he went unto him, and besought him that he would come down and heal his son, for he was at the point of death. Then said Jesus unto him, Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe. The nobleman saith unto him, Sir, come down, ere my child die. Jesus saith unto him, Go thy way, thy son liveth. And the man believed the word that Jesus had spoken unto him, and he went his way. And as he was now going down, his servants met him, and told him, saying, Thy son liveth. Then inquired he of them the hour when he began to amend. And they said unto him, Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him. So the father knew that it was at the same hour in the which Jesus said unto him, Thy son liveth: and himself believed and his whole house.”

This miracle is recorded only by St. John. The other—which I propose to make the subject of our next meditation—is related both by St. Matthew and by St. Luke. I take it as it is given by the latter of these two Evangelists in his seventh chapter, at the beginning of the chapter.

“He entered into Capernaum. And a certain centurion’s servant, who was dear unto him, was sick, and ready to die. And when he heard of Jesus, he sent unto him the elders of the Jews, beseeching him that he would come and heal his servant. And when they came to Jesus, they besought him instantly, saying, That he was worthy for whom he should do this: for he loveth our nation, and he hath built us a synagogue. Then Jesus went with them. And when he was now not far from the house, the centurion sent friends to him, saying unto him, Lord, trouble not thyself: for I am not worthy that thou shouldest enter under my roof: wherefore neither thought I myself worthy to come unto thee; but say in a word, and my servant shall be healed. For I also am a man set under authority, having under

me soldiers, and I say unto one, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it. When Jesus heard these things, he marvelled at him, and turned him about, and said unto the people that followed him, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel. And they that were sent, returning to the house, found the servant whole that had been sick."

Now certainly there are resemblances between these two occasions. In both instances the sufferer is nigh unto death; in both instances the place where the sufferer lies is Capernaum, a city on the edge of the Sea of Galilee; in both application is made to Jesus Christ at a distance; in both the miracle is accomplished by a word; in both the patient is found restored to health on the return of those who had been with Jesus Christ. So far a case is made out for identifying the two events. But here the resemblances end.

By putting the narratives close together we soon begin to find the differences appear. The healing is worked in one instance in

Capernaum itself, by the shore, in the other instance at Cana, among the hills. In one instance the sufferer is a son, in the other he is a servant. In one the sickness is fever, in the other (this we learn from St. Matthew) it is palsy. In one instance the applicant for help is a centurion, in the other he is called "a nobleman." What this last term denotes, it is rather difficult to decide exactly; but there is good reason for believing that the man was a Jew; and he was probably connected with the court of one of the Herods. What the centurion was, we know very well. He was a heathen, a Roman officer, in command of a body of soldiers quartered at Capernaum. And this distinction between the two men introduces us to the deeper differences between the two occasions.

What has hitherto been noted is rather on the surface. There are distinctions between the two cases which are much more essential and profound, and by attending closely to which we discover that very different elements of instruction are supplied by the two. There is something to be learnt in the first place by contrasting the relative advantages of the



two men for appreciating the Saviour's character and work.

One of the two men, being a Jew, had been in possession since his early youth of a true revelation—was well-instructed, most probably, in the ancient Scriptures—and familiar, no doubt, with the Jewish expectations of a Messiah. The other was a Gentile, “an alien from the commonwealth of Israel,” and an officer, too, of that cruel conquering army of Rome, to whom it was natural to despise anything that belonged to the Jews and their religion. But if we look at the picture given of the characters of the two men, we see that they differ from one another in inverse proportion to their advantages. The contrast in this respect is entirely to the credit of the centurion. His generous benevolence, for instance, was attested by the Jews themselves. “He is worthy,” they said to Jesus, “for whom thou shouldest do this: for he loveth our nation, and has built us a synagogue.” His humility also is most remarkable. “Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldest enter under my roof: wherefore neither thought I myself worthy to come

unto thee.” Nothing of this kind is said of the Jewish nobleman. And another difference, too, between the two cases seems to set before us the two characters in such a way that we give the preference to the centurion. In the one case it was the son—and apparently the only son—that was at the point of death; the common feelings of nature must of necessity have made the nobleman anxious. In the other case it was a servant, that was “sick and ready to die”—a servant—a slave—who, as we are expressly told, was “dear” unto the centurion. There is hardly any other record in the ancient world of so much feeling shown on behalf of a slave; and I think this single part of the story brings out into distinct view the centurion’s pre-eminent tenderness of heart.

On the whole it is tolerably evident that the Heathen centurion and the Jewish nobleman were men very different in character, and that our information leads us to give the preference to the former. But especially it is the difference in *the degree of their faith*—and in *the manifestation and working of their*

*faith*—that we are called to observe. One has such reliance on Christ, that he is sure it will be enough to send a message by the elders of the Jews. Hearing, too, that the Lord is on the way, he sends a second message to beg that He will not give Himself needless trouble. He has perfect confidence in His power even at a distance, and perfect confidence in His love even for a slave. But the feeling of the other is very different. He must go himself and personally see the Lord. He must use every possible urgency. His whole course of procedure puts a limitation on the Saviour's power. He thinks it is quite necessary that He should come down personally, like some common physician, and see the child; and, as to any possibility of the child being raised after death, this had clearly never entered his mind. His word is, in passionate intreaty, "Lord, come down, ere my child die;" whereas the other had said, in the calmness of perfect confidence, "Speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed." Nothing can be more clear than that the one is an instance of strong faith, the other an instance of weak faith.

And now we are better prepared to understand our Lord's different methods of treating the two men. To the one who feels confidence that the word of Jesus without His bodily presence is enough, He grants more than is asked. He immediately begins to turn His loving steps towards the centurion's house. But in answer to the nobleman, who insists that He must come down and see the child, He makes no sign of any such movement. He saw that the old inveterate fault of the Jews, the "seeking after a sign," was at work in this case. The expectation was that Jesus was to go, and, with some impressive gesture and form, to stand over the child and work a public miracle. And His answer to such a state of mind is stern and severe: "Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe." Whereas, in the other case, when Jesus heard the argument drawn by this humble centurion from his own military experience—"I can give my orders, and they are obeyed at the moment; and yet I am only a man under higher authority"—we are told that "He marvelled at him, and turned him about, and said unto the people

that followed him, I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel." It is such praise of a strong and settled faith as is not recorded in any other place.

The nobleman's faith was a weak faith, hardly to be distinguished, in its first beginning, from distrust; and it is treated accordingly. But though it is dealt with severely, it is not dealt with unkindly. Jesus Christ never despises the weakest faith, but encourages it and leads it onward by putting it under discipline. And so it grows under His gracious handling, and gradually becomes strong. The nobleman's faith grew gradually stronger: and now it will be useful to spend the rest of our time in observing how this growth took place, and with what result. Having devoted the first part of our space to an elucidation of the case, by the help of a contrast, I will employ the remainder in tracing the progress of this man's faith to its mature strength and its happy consequences.

(i.) The first point which attracts our notice is the nobleman's *anxiety*. This was the earliest step in the progress of his faith.

But for this, he never would have gone to Jesus at all. And of course, but for this, the child would have died.

And indeed this poor afflicted father, nobleman as he was, had good reason to be anxious. His son was at the point of death. He saw this very plainly. All medical means had failed. The child was evidently sinking; and unless some new and effectual remedy could be found, in a few hours all would be over. Such moments are, as many of us know, among the most sad, the most anxious, realities of life.

And is there not a close parallel between this and the case of a man who is awakened to see the value and the danger of his soul? As to the value of the soul, who can estimate it? The calculation is given most exactly in the question proposed by Christ. "What shall it profit a man, if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" And as to its danger, the disease of sin has seized upon the soul: and, so far as human means are concerned, sin is an *incurable* disease. Unless some supernatural remedy is applied, the malady must run its course to its fatal

end. And the time that remains is very short, and continually shortening. "It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment." There is good reason to be anxious.

Now certainly it is true that men in general show very little anxiety about their souls,—that they do not seem to be at all aware of their preciousness,—or at all conscious of the malady that has fastened upon them. And this is just the point—at this exact part of our subject—to which our attention is required. This absence of anxiety is want of faith. And therefore, when there *is* this anxiety, it is a sign of the presence of faith. If the father at Capernaum had not believed in his son's danger, he would not have been anxious. He was anxious because he believed.

And the first act of faith in the soul is the opening of the eye to see the danger. Some of my readers will remember the early part of the *Pilgrim's Progress*, when Christian speaks of the fearful "overthrow," in which he must "miserably come to ruin—except—the which yet I see not—some way of escape may be found ;" and again, how it is said, a

little further on, that “still as the sinner is awakened about his lost condition, there ariseth in his soul many fears and doubts and discouraging apprehensions.” Now, my fellow-sinner, have you ever experienced anything of this kind? Have you really felt the disease of sin, the danger of hell? If not, may God in His mercy make you anxious—anxious as that nobleman at Capernaum was about his dying son! A few years—perhaps a few days—and then Eternity! Oh, may this truth ring in your ears, so that you cannot forget it! .

(ii.) And the same well-known book, to which I have just referred, might furnish an illustration also of the next step in the progress of faith—the *gleam of hope* which comes after the cloud of anxiety. Evangelist says to Christian, “pointing with his finger over a very wide field, Do you see yonder wicket-gate? And Christian said, No. Then said the other, Do you see yonder shining Light? He said, I think I do. Then said Evangelist, Keep that Light in your eye, and go up directly thereto; so shalt thou see the Gate.”



“Do you see yonder shining Light? I think I do.” This question and answer,—and the going immediately in the direction of the light with the hope of finding the gate,—this sums up the second passage in the early growth of the Christian’s faith. There may be many things to dishearten him, many temptations urging him to deviate from this true direction. The Slough of Despond is to be crossed. The Worldly Wise are sure to volunteer their bad counsel. But still, where faith really exists, the footsteps will struggle on to the place where the gate is to be found. The nobleman has seen this shining light in the rumour which has reached him concerning Jesus. As yet he has a very imperfect apprehension of the vast sympathy of this Teacher, of the unlimited extent of His power. But he has learnt what encourages him to hope. And one thing at least is certain : there is nothing to be expected in any other quarter. But he has heard how patient this Teacher is, how He listens to tales of sorrow, and what confidence He inspires : how all men, and especially all who suffer, are drawn to Him

with an indescribable trust. How much he had heard of any actual miracles, we do not know. This, as we have seen above, is said to have been only "the second miracle" that Jesus wrought in Galilee. But there may have been other wonders elsewhere. However this may be, the nobleman had some hope in the disposition and the resources of this Prophet: and he acted accordingly. "When he heard that Jesus was come out of Judæa into Galilee, he went unto him; and besought him that he would come down and heal his son."

(iii.) And now, thirdly, another characteristic of living faith is what we might express by the word *tenacity*. Its language is: "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me." It may have many misgivings, many fluctuations. But it keeps its hold. The fair green leaves of outward life may for the time be gone. The frost may cut the plant down to the very ground. But it does not die—because the roots are not dead.

"I will not let thee go, except thou bless me." "Sir, come down, ere my child die." Oh, how natural this is! Jesus has spoken

some very severe words: "Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe." The nobleman does not demur to the rebuke—he does not justify himself—but he goes on asking. The child is dying, and he cannot be put off. It is just the case of the Syrophœnician woman—"Truth, Lord! yet the dogs eat of the crumbs." That Gospel history and this are great examples of the tenacity which is always characteristic of true faith, even when it is weak.

Moreover it is to be observed that faith grows by being tried. This is no doubt one reason of our Saviour's apparent sternness on occasions such as these. His gracious discipline was meant to prove and foster, not to chill and to dissipate, the believing spirit. When faith rallies under such discouragements, and finds itself rewarded at last, it is far stronger than if it had never been tried at all. Even before the full reward came, we find the nobleman's faith growing rapidly stronger. At the next step of the narrative it can be observed that a great progress has already been made.

(iv.) *Obedience* is the best word to describe this next step in the progressive advance of faith. The nobleman takes on trust what is told to him, and simply does what Christ directs him to do. "Go thy way: thy son liveth." Not only does all discouragement arising from the rebuke pass away, but all thought of asking the Saviour to come to the house has passed away. There was something in the Lord's voice or look or manner, or in the power of secret grace put forth at that moment, which made him feel that a word was enough. He does not now prescribe what is to be done, but is entirely submissive. "Go thy way: thy son liveth." This language, under such circumstances, might easily have raised many questions. But "the man believed the word that Jesus had spoken to him;" and therefore he "went his way."

There is something, too, well worthy of careful notice in the quiet, calm, deliberate manner of this obedience. His mind seems to have been tranquillised into a state of simple trust, and he was no longer in haste. The distance from Cana to Capernaum is

about twenty-five miles. We know that these words were spoken at the seventh hour ; and if we take the common reckoning, it is evident that he might have reached his home before the close of that day. Even if we take the other reckoning, it seems to us that he might have journeyed through the night. But such is his repose in the assurance he has received, that he travels quite at leisure, and does not come down to the city on the lake till the next day. All his anxiety appears to be gone. And when he meets his servants, he is not the first to speak. They are almost more full of wonder than he is. His mind was at rest, even before they met him. It seems to me a beautiful illustration of the prophet's words : " He that believeth shall not make haste."

(v.) But now, in the short dialogue which did take place between him and his servants, there is something which we ought not to lose, for it exemplifies a certain habit of mind, which is formed as faith grows towards maturity. He had previously a good confidence that all would be well ; but he inquired, very naturally, " the hour at

which the child began to amend." "Began to amend." You will observe that he was hardly prepared for an instantaneous restoration to perfect health. That the child was even alive was an indication of a great improvement; but the form of the inquiry shows that he had not taken in the possibility of the disease being absolutely gone. This, however, is not the point to which I was referring. When he made this inquiry, the servants "said unto him, Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him. So the father knew that it was at the same hour in the which Jesus said unto him, Thy son liveth: *and he believed.*" He had believed before, and had given proof of his faith; but now he believed far more strongly and deeply. Now his trust rested on experience. He observed the coincidence, and clearly saw the hand of God in it: and his inward conviction received a great and most comforting accession of strength.

And God's true children, when their faith is ripening, *observe coincidences*. A certain habit of mind is formed, which makes them clear-sighted in regard to the operations of

Providence. This, in fact, is one of the distinctions between the mere profession of religion and its living experience. Men in general have no real apprehension of Providence as respects the common details of life. Many men absolutely disbelieve any such minute attention on the part of God to individual concerns. "But the secret of the Lord is with them that fear him." The ripe Christian finds one source of his strength and of his delight in observing how events fit in, so to speak, one with another, and how all "work together for his good." Let every one who is sceptical on this subject go to the aged and wise Christian, and hear how he speaks of the events of his past experience. Yes, and I will send this sceptical scholar to some very poor man, to whom the wants of life are barely supplied. He will perhaps be astonished to find how deep a conviction there is in that poor man that every step of his life has been minutely guided, protected, and blessed,—that friends were sent just at the right moment,—that cares and anxieties were removed in the most unexpected ways,—that what seemed to be

unbearable troubles have turned out to be inestimable blessings,—that God's gracious hand has been visible everywhere,—and that (to use an expression which I once heard under such circumstances myself) it seems to him as if God had been kinder to him—yes, kinder to that poor unknown man—than to all the world besides.

(vi.) But this is not quite all that we are told concerning the happy result of this miracle. It is not simply said, as the effect of this close observation of God's goodness, that the nobleman himself *believed*,—but that “*himself believed and his house.*” This brings me to my last point, the beneficial influence, through his faith, exerted upon others. His believing led to believing on the part of those around him. When this blessing came to him, it came to “his house.”

Faith is diffusive. It is like light—like salt—like the root which you put into the ground in spring. It is a living principle which works outward from a centre over a circumference, greater or less according to circumstances. A man who is conscious to himself of having received blessing from



Christ is not content to receive it for himself only. He receives that he may give. The New Testament is full of examples of this radiation, if I may so call it, which proceeds from the heart of the true believer. The Jailer at Philippi, for instance, is a parallel case to that which we have now in hand. The Apostle's word to him was, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, *and thy house.*"

So let me end with one short word to the true believer. This may probably meet the eye of some who have endeavoured to serve the Lord faithfully for many years, and who could teach the writer far more than he can teach them. But even to those who are advanced very far—and very happily—on the path of faith, it is still useful to say this, which is suggested by the conclusion of such histories as that of the Jailer at Philippi, who "rejoiced, believing in God with all his house,"—or of the nobleman at Capernaum, who "himself believed and his house." Remember the duties of the Christian at home,—see that your influence spreads to those around you,—see that you so live, that

your friends, your brothers and sisters, your father and mother, your wife, your children, your servants,—may “take knowledge of you that you have been with Jesus,” and have indeed “tasted that the Lord is gracious.”

VI.


STRONG FAITH AT CAPERNAUM.

“Speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed.”

MATT. VIII 8.

## VI.

### STRONG FAITH AT CAPERNAUM.

E have no difficulty in fixing on this centurion as an example—and as intended to be an example to us—of a very strong faith. The whole account of what he said and did, as laid before us by both St. Matthew and St. Luke, shows this very plainly. And the comment of the Lord Jesus is explicit: “Verily, I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel.” Among all those in Judæa and Galilee, who had welcomed His teaching with more or less readiness,—among all those who had trusted in Him with more or less confidence,—He had not found one single example of faith to be compared with this.

The phrase too which is employed on this

occasion by both Evangelists of our Lord's state of mind, if I may use that expression, is very remarkable and full of meaning. There is always the deepest interest in anything connected with the human feelings of our Divine Lord. Now of all such human feelings, wonder or surprise is perhaps that which we should least be prepared to expect in the description of His life on earth. But we do find this feeling made distinctly manifest on two occasions. Once we are told by St. Mark that He marvelled at the *unbelief* of the Jews. Here we are told by St. Matthew and St. Luke that He marvelled at the *faith* of a Heathen.

The centurion's faith—compared with the unbelief of the Jews—was indeed wonderful ; and the marvel was great precisely on this account, that the Jews had “ much everyway ” to prepare them for the acceptance of Christ. To them were committed the sacred oracles. Theirs were the prophecies, and the covenants, and the worship of the Temple, and the remembrance of judgments and mercies, which they recognised as coming from God. Whereas with the centurion there was

“much everyway” to hinder him from believing in Christ. He belonged to a different nation from the Jews; and to a nation which had conquered the Jews, and therefore had a natural tendency to despise them. Where his early days had been spent, we do not know; but they had been spent somewhere in a corrupt and Heathen atmosphere. His mother had not taught him the stories of Abel, or of Samuel, or of Joshua. There were no learned doctors within reach, for the hearing or for the asking of questions: no scribes to explain hard passages of the Law. His later life was passed in the army, without any true religion to correct its peculiar temptations to wrong-doing. If his faith, then, notwithstanding all these disadvantages and hindrances, rose pre-eminent and overtopped all instances of Jewish faith, it must indeed have been a very strong faith.

It becomes, therefore, a study of considerable interest and importance to mark the distinguishing features of this man’s character and conduct. By seeing what he was, and by carefully observing the manner in which he acted, we may hope to learn much

that will be useful to ourselves in showing how it is that our own faith is so weak and poor—and thus also in showing how we may expect to find it growing stronger. We are following the same train of thought into which we were led on the last occasion. Then we had before our attention an example of weak faith, and we watched the process of its becoming gradually stronger. Both examples belong to the same familiar place in the Gospel history, the Lord's own city, Capernaum. We put the two cases side by side, the nobleman seeking life and health for his son, the centurion seeking life and health for his servant: we marked the resemblances and the contrast—the resemblances on the surface—the contrast in the deep inner lessons of the two characters and the two occasions. Then we examined closely the features of the former case, so as to see how weak faith, notwithstanding its mistakes, is yet not refused by Christ, how it is placed by Him under discipline and gradually becomes strong. Now let us look separately at this other case, which presents to us the example of a faith strong and



robust from the first; and may God enable us so distinctly to fasten upon the main points in this description, that we may be moved to imitation, and be blessed accordingly!

(i.) In the first place, we observe in the centurion a *very urgent sense of need*. This was the first motive of the action which he took. So far the two cases, of the nobleman and the centurion, are very similar. There can be no faith at all without a sense of need. The case of the centurion was very pressing. The narrative, as given by St. Matthew, opens thus: "And when Jesus was entered into Capernaum, there came unto him a centurion, beseeching him, and saying, Lord, my servant lieth at home sick of the palsy, grievously tormented." As given by St. Luke, it opens thus: "Now when he had ended all his sayings in the audience of the people, he entered into Capernaum. And a certain centurion's servant, who was dear unto him, was sick, and ready to die." As usual, by comparing the Evangelists, we bring out the facts into greater and more lively clearness.

As to what the precise nature of the illness

was, this we must leave to be decided by those who are acquainted with medical symptoms, and especially medical symptoms in the climate of the East. The main point for us is that the centurion had no hope of procuring relief through any power of his own. There is a peculiar helplessness and hopelessness in palsy. But here was evidently something more than what we simply call palsy in England. I imagine that besides the mere powerlessness of the patient's frame, there were painful contractions and contortions of the limbs. There is a case very similar in one of the Apocryphal books. In the account of one of the Jewish wars between the times of Malachi and John the Baptist, we are told that a man named Alcimus was "struck by a plague, so that his enterprises were hindered"—and oh! how soon, with any of us, our very best enterprises might be arrested by a sudden stroke of fatal illness!—but this is said in passing. This man, Alcimus, we read, was "taken with a palsy"—his jaws and his throat were affected, "so that he could no more speak anything, nor give order concern-

ing his house,"—and in the end "he died with great torment." You will observe that the very words are used, which we find in St. Matthew. Besides the helplessness of palsy, there were great agonies, which must have been very distressing to every spectator with any feeling. And there was no remedy. Above all, there was the evident approach of death. Thus the centurion was destitute of all resources for relief. His ability could give no strength to those palsied limbs. His sympathy could not assuage those dreadful sufferings. Medical skill had been of no avail. The patient was dying. He might sink away at any moment, or the next convulsion might be his last.

This utter despair of any power of our own is no hindrance to faith. On the contrary, it is one of the essential conditions of a strong faith. The primary characteristic of faith is, that it is recipient. It does not bring something to God, but it welcomes that which God gives. The deeper therefore the sense of "having nothing" in ourselves, the greater is our aptitude for "possessing all things" in Him.

Desire then,—let me urge this as the lesson we are to learn at this point of the narrative,—desire to form a true estimate of the weakness—the palsied weakness—of human nature. Add this, too, that sin involves suffering, sooner or later. “Grievous torment” is that which properly belongs to it. And add this above all, that the danger is imminent. The time is very short; and no remedy of our own is within reach. We must receive the remedy from God, if we are to have it at all. Seek, by calm thought and honest self-examination, to foster this recipient state of mind. So will the first preparation be made for a very strong faith,—yes, and a richly-rewarded faith.

(ii.) Thus far, then, taking both miracles as our guides, we may say of faith, that it is the hand which lays hold on God’s gifts. But this is not by any means the whole of the case, as presented to us in the history of the centurion. Strong faith is no mere passive reception. It is a very active principle, and it touches the moral life of the soul at all points. This we shall see if we turn to another aspect of this narrative.

One description of faith given in Scripture is that it is a principle "*working by love*;" and this was most evidently a characteristic of the Roman soldier, who is now before our notice. The anxiety which he felt was not for a near relation—not, for instance, as in the case of the nobleman, for a son, apparently an only son. It was not the result of that mere natural feeling, which, under such circumstances, may overpower the mind and heart even of a bad man. The patient was very far from belonging to the circle of the centurion's kindred. It was for a servant that all this anxiety was felt; and it evidently was the anxiety of affection. St. Luke makes this very clear, by saying in express terms that the servant was "dear unto him."

At first sight this may seem not at all surprising. And certainly, in our state of society, such affection for a servant ought not to be surprising. There is hardly any person to whom more regard is due, than a faithful servant. This is not always considered so carefully as it ought to be. But a servant, whom we can thoroughly trust, is one of the greatest comforts in life, and has

a very special claim on our gratitude. Besides this, our servants are dependent on us. Our home is their home. And, moreover, that they may enter into our service, they are separated from their own homes. Sometimes links of a very close kind are broken, in order that new links may be formed for our benefit. These, however, are Christian ideas, and belong to a very different state of society from that in which the centurion lived.

That servant at Capernaum was a slave. His master could have caused him to be "beaten with many stripes;" and no one could have found fault. His master could have sold him; and no interference would have taken place. He could even have killed him; and would probably have suffered no penalty. These are not favourable relations of life, for the growing up of a close friendship between the employer and the employed. In thinking of slave-holding countries, we extend our compassion, and very properly, to the moral degradation of the slaves; but perhaps there is quite as much reason for serious and sorrowful feeling in reference to the moral temptations of the masters. But

we see in this example, how love and respect can grow under very unfavourable circumstances, just as we sometimes see that a fruit-tree can strike its roots among the rocks, and display its leaves in much beauty, and its fruit too in rich profusion.

It is indeed possible that this slave had high qualities, which could hardly fail to endear him; and, as was sometimes the case, he may have been a man of superior education, and very serviceable in responsible duties. If he was the centurion's only servant, then we identify him with the person to whom allusion is made in his own sentence: "I say to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it; and we are at liberty to infer, if we choose, that he was a man of peculiarly willing and prompt obedience. Still, making every allowance for all such considerations, we cannot fail to mark and admire the warm zeal and active exertion of the centurion on behalf of the slave "who was dear to him."

And certainly it is well worthy of notice—and very instructive—that this character, which is presented to us as an example of strong faith, is equally an example of strong

love. And here again we must add in something which we learn from St. Luke. "When he heard of Jesus, he sent unto him the elders of the Jews, beseeching him that he would come and heal his servant. And when they came to Jesus, they besought him instantly, saying, That he was worthy for whom he should do this: for he loveth our nation, and he hath built us a synagogue." This centurion's affection then for the servant was no mere capricious fancy for an individual person who happened to be very attractive or very useful, while there was indifference to everyone besides. The Jewish elders, whom he engaged to present his case to Jesus, said: "He is worthy for whom thou shouldest do this: for he loveth our nation, and hath built us a synagogue,"—or rather, as it should be translated, "at his own expense he built us our synagogue"—perhaps the one synagogue in the place, and, if so, the very building in which Jesus taught in Capernaum at other times.

Now this was very surprising testimony to come from such a quarter. If we recur to the remark that was made above concerning



the position of the Roman soldiers in Judæa and Galilee, we see clearly that there must have been no small antipathy towards the alien and dominant race to be laid aside, before such words could possibly have been spoken by Jews of one of these Roman soldiers. And there must have been a large, warm, and generous love in this man, to have overcome all this Jewish antipathy—to have melted all this frost into a thaw. And the consideration of this side of the centurion's character turns our thoughts into a channel which it is very important that they should take. Faith and love are twin graces. And not only are they born together, but they grow together, and they mutually strengthen each other, while they grow. Let us see if this reflection cannot help us to find out one cause of the weakness of our faith. There can be no doubt of this, that selfishness, love of ease, eagerness for mere enjoyment, disregard of the wants of others, constitute a very unfavourable atmosphere for the growth of strong faith. True it is, and never to be forgotten, that "faith is the gift of God;" but we have much in our

power, as regards its weakness or its strength. There are certain fixed laws in the development of religious life, which cannot be disregarded without loss.

(iii.) This sending of the Jewish elders to Jesus, as recounted by St. Luke, leads us to another point. Whether the centurion himself had a direct interview with the Saviour, besides dispatching these messengers, or whether the "sending" by others of St. Luke is in fact the "asking" of St. Matthew, it is hardly worth while here to inquire. He did send "elders of the Jews;" and the reason why he sent them is told to us. And indeed for the same reason he sent a second company of messengers. St. Luke continues: "Then Jesus went with them. And when he was now not far from the house, the centurion sent friends to him, saying unto him, Lord, trouble not thyself: for I am not worthy that thou shouldest enter under my roof: wherefore neither thought I myself worthy to come unto thee: but say in a word, and my servant shall be healed."

*Humility*, then, is as conspicuous in this case as love. And they too are intertwining

graces, mutually supporting one another. Wherever there is forgetfulness of others, there is almost always a disproportionate regard to self. And in whatever degree we can forget ourselves, or think little of ourselves, in that degree will the readiness to do service to others assume larger proportions and pass more easily into a habit of life.

This centurion was not a likely man, in the nature of things, to underrate his own importance. Capernaum was not a very large place; and he was living there in command of a body of soldiers. Whether other similar bodies of soldiers were quartered there, under the command of other centurions, we do not know. But he had the town very much at his mercy: and the race of people round him were Jews, who were notoriously despised by the Romans. It was a position very unfavourable to the growth of humility. One of the circumstances most to be regretted in our own rule of India, is that our countrymen have so much inducement to look down on the natives with contempt. It must have been the same in old times in our own country, when our ancestors were

uncivilised, and Roman centurions and soldiers were quartered, as they were for several hundred years, in various parts of England, just as at Capernaum. But, moreover, as we know from ancient Roman authors, there was a special habit of despising and disliking the Jews, more than any other nations, who, at the same period, were subject to the sway of Heathen Rome.

Again, this centurion evidently was not a weak man in natural temperament. He had very strict and correct notions of military discipline. He was not a likely man to be disobeyed. "I have soldiers under me, and I say to this man, Go, and he goeth, and to another, Come, and he cometh." If you had been a soldier under that man's command, you would not have dared to disregard his authority,—just as, if you had been his servant, you would have been glad to have such a man for your master. And yet, with all this, how low an estimate he set upon himself! Dimly as he must have known Jesus Christ, he evidently felt that there was an immeasurable distance between himself and the Great and Holy Prophet, who was

going about through Galilee, "doing good." And this must ever be the feeling, when sinful man draws into nearness to Jesus Christ. With all the love and confidence that may be in such an approach—and all the greater in proportion to that love and confidence—is humility. This is strongly exemplified in the language of John the Baptist. "His shoe's latchet I am not worthy to unloose." "He must increase: I must decrease." I am nothing: Christ is everything. This is always the language of strong faith.

No example of faith, we are told, so great as the faith of this Heathen centurion, had been found among all the people of Israel. And perhaps there is no standard, by which we can better estimate the force of his faith, than by contrasting his humility with the pride of the Jews. Many of them utterly despised Jesus Christ, and treated Him with scorn and insult. And when they sought to do Him honour, it was too often as though they sought to do honour to themselves. He was invited to banquets in their houses: and there they watched Him, set snares for Him in conversation, and sought to discredit

Him with the people. Here the suppliant's mind is filled with lowly and reverential respect. He does not even deem himself worthy to receive Jesus Christ under his roof. And theirs, as I have said, were all the advantages, his all the disadvantages. They had the prophecies, and the appointed worship, and the long preparation of their own history. He had been nurtured in idolatry, with nothing to speak to him of a coming Messiah,—and at this time he was attached to a cruel conquering army, and acting under a hard unscrupulous government, in the midst of a discontented and despised population. Yet how lowly he is in his own eyes, how submissive and meek and thankful in his acceptance of the mercy of Christ! O admirable example, shining bright amid surrounding darkness, showing us that, as is our humility, so will be our faith!

(iv.) And now one thing more remains to be noticed, which distinguishes this incident in the Gospel history, and marks it off for definite instruction of its own. This centurion's faith was not an irrational faith, but closely connected with very calm reflection.

In one sense, indeed, faith must always be unreasoning. Faith and reason are not the same faculty of the mind. But they are not on this account opposite or hostile faculties. And the faith of this centurion at Capernaum was attended by, and fortified by, a very careful exercise of reason.

See how he argues. "I am a man under authority:" and yet by the exertion of my will I can secure the obedience of those who are under me. "I say to this man, Come, and he cometh—to that man, Go, and he goeth—and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it." Hence he infers that Jesus Christ, whose authority he recognises as far above all common human power, must secure obedience, when He exerts that supreme will. It is a most logical conclusion: and we have here a most important part of the instruction of the narrative. Above it has been said that strong faith implies much love, that strong faith implies much humility. Now, it is our part to observe likewise that these sentences, which are a testimony to the centurion's faith, are a testimony also to *the exercise of his reason.*

And he does not argue from anything vague and remote. There is no going off into any clouds of speculation—no fetching of a theory from some dim distance. He is not visionary in his reasoning, but very practical. It is a homely inference from the facts before him—from the common experience of his daily life.

Let us be encouraged, then, to take the things which surround us, and to argue from them. From the things of earth we can draw conclusions regarding the things of heaven. You are, perhaps, the father of a family. Reason out from the feelings which you have towards your children, what the feelings of our Heavenly Father are towards us, whom He condescends to call His children. Or your attention has been called to some prisoner brought before the judge. See how the law takes its course, how its penalties inevitably follow. So must the Divine Law take its course, with all its fearful penalties, unless a ransom or a surety be found. And we know, to our joy, that a Ransom and a Surety have been found.

Similarly, from observing ourselves and



the power of which we are conscious, we can learn much concerning God and His power. And it is this analogy in regard to power, that is the special point before us now. Consider what you can do. Hence infer what God can do. If we can enforce obedience within our own little sphere of action, how can there be any incapacity in God to do whatever we may need? What infinite power He has out of all this confusion to bring a beautiful order! What unexhausted reserves He has of providential resources for smoothing all difficulties! Make it your habit to follow such trains of thought as these. So will your faith grow more robust. This kind of reflection is the very nutriment of faith. It gives strength and solidity to its substance; and makes it active and vigorous.

Thus, then, by carefully observing these characteristic features of this centurion's character and conduct, we attain to some apprehension of the conditions which must be fulfilled, if faith is to be strong,—or at least we gain a view of some helps, in the use of which we may hope that our faith will be strengthened. We may confidently

expect such a result,—if, under the direction of God's grace, we obtain a deeper sense of our sad want and necessity—if we are diligent in the exercise of love towards those around us—if we learn to take a low and humble estimate of ourselves—and if we seriously bring our powers of thought and reflection to bear upon subjects connected with the soul.

In two successive meditations we have had before us an example of weak faith at Capernaum, and an example of strong faith at Capernaum. We saw on the last occasion how the weak faith became stronger: and now we have just marked some of the accompaniments—the necessary accompaniments—of a strong faith. It might, it certainly would be, for our religious advantage, if at the close of these meditations, we were to read carefully and together the three narratives in the fourth of St. John, the eighth of St. Matthew, and the seventh of St. Luke, with an earnest prayer that we may be of the number of those who in all ages have been, by such methods, “out of weakness made strong.”

VII.

THE REASONING OF FAITH.

“ Truth, Lord : yet the dogs eat of the crumbs  
which fall from their masters’ table.”

MATT. xv. 27.

## VII.

### THE REASONING OF FAITH.

**B**EAUTIFUL analogies may sometimes be traced between the miracles and the parables of our Lord. This, indeed, is quite what we should expect. Jesus Christ was a Teacher, not only in His words, but in His actions also—and His sacred teaching must of necessity have been consistent with itself. His whole conduct was a perpetual and harmonious lesson of True Religion. His miracles were not merely works of wonder, but were so arranged in all their circumstances as to convey instruction. *The mind of Christ* shone through them all.

Or look at this matter on another side. The Scripture, which records both the

miracles and the parables, is, of course, consistent with itself, and is all directed to one religious end for the benefit of our souls. Those things are recorded which conduce to that end. Hence all the incidental circumstances connected with the miracles should be devoutly considered. They reveal to us *the mind of the Spirit*, by whose influence and inspiration the narratives were constructed; and they will be found to illustrate the direct lessons of those parables which are recorded in the same pages, and, in return, to receive illustration from them.

As a first instance to exemplify this general remark, let us put side by side the parable of the Good Samaritan with the account of the thankful Samaritan Leper. In the former, the main point is a lesson of charity; in the latter, one prominent and most instructive feature is an act of thanksgiving for a great mercy. But incidentally, in the parable, our Lord puts before His Jewish hearers a *Samaritan* as the example of that charity which both the Levite and the Priest had neglected. Incidentally too, but very pointedly, in the account of the miracle it is

recorded that he who displayed the gratitude of which the other nine lepers made no sign, was a *Samaritan*. "There are not found that returned to give glory to God, save this stranger." Thus, in each case, and in the same way, our attention is called to this, that the religious state of the heart is infinitely more important than the possession of religious privilege. The Samaritan might be under great disadvantages as compared with the Jew—he was certainly much despised and disliked by the Jew; but if he was more charitable, more thankful, than the Jew, then he was better than the Jew—he furnished, in fact, to the Jew an example to be imitated.

Another case of the healing of a leper, placed in comparison with another of St. Luke's parables, may furnish a second illustration of the remark made above. The instantaneous forgiveness of the Prodigal Son, though he went back homewards with some doubt and fear in his heart, seems to me very analogous to the instantaneous answer given to the leper, who said,—conscious, as the Prodigal Son was, of his

misery and shame—"Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean." The Prodigal's father saw him "a great way off," and went immediately to meet him, and the alienation was removed at once. So Jesus takes instantly the words used by the poor leper, and, as it were, makes them His own: "I will; be thou clean." Viewing leprosy as a type of sin, and taking our Lord's acts of healing as symbolical of deep spiritual mercies, we see in the miracle, as in the parable, the mind of Christ, revealing to us His Father's will; and in the manner in which the record of the narrative is presented to us, we see the mind of the Spirit, in harmony with what is more directly set forth in the parable.

Now, turning our thoughts to that miracle, which is proposed as the subject of the present paper, we can again find an instance of direct teaching which has a parallel significance. Jesus, on one of His journeys, is come into the neighbourhood of Tyre and Sidon. Here a poor Heathen woman, named by St. Matthew "a woman of Canaan," applies to Him for relief in her distress.



Certainly she is in great affliction—for her daughter at home is “grievously vexed with an evil spirit;” and certainly she comes with a prayer of the most affecting and piercing earnestness. But the silence, the apparent indifference, of the Saviour is most extraordinary. “He answered her not a word.” The disciples, too, themselves seem to have felt the urgency of the case. “They came to their Master and besought him, saying, Send her away: for she crieth after us.” By which they meant, I suppose, this: “Grant her request, Lord, as Thou hast done in other cases: for we cannot bear to see her wretchedness and to hear her passionate entreaty.” Then He speaks. But the words that He utters are strange indeed, to be heard from those lips: “I am not sent, but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” We can hardly imagine a sentence more disheartening. Still she perseveres. It would seem, from the corresponding narrative in St. Mark’s Gospel, that she had now followed Him into the house whither He had retired from the multitude outside. Here she falls down at His feet and “worships him,” crying, “Lord,

help me." But again He repels her with words of still greater discouragement. Using, perhaps, the furniture of the house—the table—and the bread upon it—as the basis of His saying (such, at least, was His customary manner of teaching), He speaks thus: "It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to dogs." Then comes forth that wonderful reasoning of the woman's faith,—for reasoning it is,—which is contained in the sentence prefixed to these remarks. And then at last is given the Lord's gracious answer, like gentle rain after parching and long-continued drought: "O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt." From "that very hour" her daughter was healed. St. Mark concludes the story by saying that, "when she was come to her house, she found the devil gone out, and her daughter laid upon the bed."

Now, in this long refusal on Christ's part, in this unwearied importunity on hers, we have a very close resemblance to what is set before us in the parable of the Widow and the Unjust Judge. He "would not for a while:" but at length he did grant her

request, lest "by her continual coming" she should "weary him." In each case, too, the suppliant is a woman, which makes the parallel all the more complete. No doubt there is a great contrast, in one respect, between the record of the miracle and the structure of the parable. The unjust judge is so bad, that he does not scruple to say openly of himself, that he "fears not God, nor regards man," and that it is merely selfishness which induces him to do an act of simple justice to a widow: while of Jesus Christ we know that in Him were all justice, all mercy, all love, in perfection. But, in truth, within and under this superficial contrast of circumstances, lies a deep resemblance as regards the teaching conveyed in both places. What the parable sets forth is *that which appears to us* the dealing of God with the souls of His praying people, when He is very slow in answering their prayer. And the argument is, that if an unjust and selfish man will grant a prayer because of importunity, surely God, who is all justice and mercy, will not resist the importunity of prayer, though He may delay "long." The widow in the para-

ble, like the woman of Canaan, perseveres in supplication notwithstanding discouragement: and in each case importunity penetrates through the resistance or the apparent resistance, and wins its way to the granting of the request.

Now, in commenting on this interview of the Saviour with the Canaanitish woman for our own religious benefit, I think it will be useful if first we consider some general features of the case which come easily to view, and then dwell on some personal characteristics of this suppliant's admirable and victorious faith.

(i.) The *place* where the interview occurred is itself significant. This particular journey was quite exceptional in our Lord's earthly life. On no other occasion is it written that He touched Heathen ground. His words of Himself are: "I am not sent but to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." As to the reasons why He so restricted Himself, on this we must not dwell: but such restriction was the law of His life. Just once, however, He does come in contact with a Heathen country.

Moreover, the cities of Tyre and Sidon did not constitute a commonplace heathenism. Their early and extensive commercial enterprise had connected them with the most distant coasts. While the Jews were closely limited to their own land, the people of Tyre and Sidon were in intercourse with all the world. Again, through the vicissitudes of war they had been conspicuous in the Greek and Roman periods of history. As viewed, too, by the Jews, they had been eminent for a cruel and licentious idolatry. If there had been some occasions of peaceful and pleasant intercourse between them, as, for instance, in those negotiations of king Solomon and king Hiram, which were connected with the building of the Temple, recollections of a more abiding and animated kind were associated with the horrors of Jezebel's reign and the worship of Baal.

Here, then, it is on this frontier that Jesus Christ, on one occasion, exercises His wonder-working mercy. Is it not a most expressive prophecy of the universal spread of the Gospel and of the gathering-in of the nations? This woman is called by St. Mark

“a Greek,” which may be viewed as simply denoting heathenism, and also a “Syrophœnician,” which indicates the neighbourhood where she lived. By St. Matthew she is named a “Canaanite,” a phrase which marked her as belonging to a race whom the Jews held accursed. She was not like the centurion of Capernaum, a proselyte already connected with the Jewish religion—not like the woman at the well of Samaria, in whose case, too, there was already a close approximation to the countrymen of Christ. She was a thorough alien. And looking now, with all these thoughts in the mind, at this meeting on the Syrophœnician frontier, we see a deep meaning in this one exception to Christ’s general rule.

(ii.) If this be so—if this Canaanitish woman is a type of converted heathenism—we might expect in her case a signal illustration of that inward principle of *faith* through which the blessings of Christ are received. St. Paul says, in the Epistle to the Romans: “Is God the God of the Jews only? Is he not also of the Gentiles? Yes: of the Gentiles also: seeing it is one God,

which shall justify the circumcision by faith, and the uncircumcision through faith." Now certainly if it were desirable to exhibit, on this exceptional occasion, in some very marked way, the characteristic features and the peculiar strength of religious faith, this could not have been done more forcibly than in Christ's treatment of the heathen suppliant. This consideration supplies, even on general grounds, some explanation of the very remarkable nature of the interview. Clearly everything was so arranged as to bring out into prominence the characteristics of faith. The suppliant woman comes to Christ. She feels her need of Him. She has confidence in Him. When repelled, she returns. When argued with, she argues in reply. She feels sure that, if she perseveres, her request must be granted. As we read the history, we see that every circumstance is so related to us as to bring out to view the tenacity and hopefulness of faith. Hardly anywhere else have we such an example of the working and the victory of this principle. It is an instance full of rich instruction, and with a large and practical bearing on the

whole range of Christianity. Every true conversion, wherever Christ's Religion has penetrated in the Heathen world—all Missionary progress—all our personal growth, too, in spiritual life—seems to be summed up in this example, as the expanded flower and the rich fruit are contained in the germ.

(iii.) Yet we observe that, in the example before us, *the law of God's dispensations* is not broken or laid aside. This fact presents itself to our view most forcibly when we carefully study the narrative. Just as in the sequence of Divinely-appointed history, so in this particular instance, the blessing comes to the Gentile in close connection with the original blessing to the Jew. It does not appear at all certain that Jesus actually crossed the frontier of the land. It was she that came over the Jewish border, to be blest by Him. She addresses Him as "the Son of David." She finds no fault with His primary reference to the "lost sheep of the house of Israel." She recognises even a fitness in what He says of "the children's bread." The existence of Jewish privilege, and the fact that this was the course through



which Divine Revelation came to the Gentile world, are brought out here very strongly to view.

Nor must we forget another side of this principle of Divine law and order which more practically and more directly concerns ourselves. It was in falling down before Him and in worshipping Him that she received what she needed. This daughter of an accursed race is a pattern to all human souls in regard to their salvation. We must seek for our own spiritual blessings, not in any exceptional manner, but in the way which God appoints, in the lowest humility, and entirely through Christ.

So now let us turn our thoughts to that which is more applicable, directly and separately, to each one of ourselves. In fact, though the general remarks made above relate to subjects of considerable importance, the individual applicability of the miracle to each human soul is really its most prominent point. In what I said at the beginning, I spoke of the words and conduct of the Syro-phœnician woman as an example of *the reasoning of faith*. And such, indeed, is a

true description of the case. It is often remarked that the spheres of Reason and Faith are different; and no doubt, in a general sense, this is true. But Faith may set in motion the process of *reasoning*: and to very good purpose. So it is here; and I think we might gain much in our apprehension of the religious meaning of this occasion by reflecting carefully on the incident in this manner, and by pursuing this train of thought at length.

(i.) First, observe the *boldness* with which she reasons. We often admire the way in which a scientific discoverer will push out boldly into the dark with the confident expectation of reaching a great result. Having laid hold of some grand principle, or having made himself sure of some leading facts, he is quite sanguine as to the consequences that will follow. It is through this habit of mind that the most important discoveries have sometimes been attained. And something of the same habit of mind is manifested in the conduct of the Canaanitish woman. Not only is she conscious of her own desperate need: but she has laid a firm grasp on the

character of Christ. And, having these two principles strong within her, she is daunted by nothing. She launches out boldly, as it were, into the open sea, like the ships of her native Tyre and Sidon; and she brings back a rich freight of blessing for herself and for the Church.

(ii.) Again, to pursue the same comparison, we often admire *ingenuity* in reasoning; and very justly. It is a great talent, very prolific of important results. A quick sagacity in dealing with a difficulty—a ready and unexpected turn in meeting a formidable argument—is very often of the utmost value on an emergency. Such is the method by which this woman surmounts an apparently insuperable obstacle. Can we fail to wonder at the cleverness of her argument? And let not an objection be raised to this mode of expression. It is, of course, essential that we should never for a moment lose our reverence in commenting on a Scripture narrative. Yet why should we hesitate to say that we have here woman's wit on sacred ground? I have suggested that the Lord's words were, perhaps, like a parable drawn from the

furniture—the spread table—the bread—in the house; and what extraordinary ingenuity—what a charm of quick intelligence in her ready use of the same associations in reply—“Truth, Lord; yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters’ table!”

(iii.) This leads me to say, thirdly, that a course of reasoning in scientific progress has often great *beauty*. All eminent mathematicians are conscious of this fact; and, so far as others are able to understand the process of such reasoning, they see the beauty too. In this respect, again, the comparison might with justice be closely pressed. The beauty of the process of reasoning, which faith pursued in that memorable interview on the borders of Tyre and Sidon, must often have been felt by every thoughtful reader of the narrative.

Now, for a last impression to carry away with us, let us pause for a moment on the happiness of this woman when she returned to her house. St. Mark adds, as we have seen, something which we do not find in St. Matthew. “When she was come to her house, she found the devil gone out, and her

daughter laid upon the bed." All that distraction of mind, all those distortions of the limbs, all that utter mysterious misery was gone: and the girl lay there, rational and calm, and ready to respond to her mother's affection and care. What repose must thenceforward have been in that house! what thankfulness of heart! What a sweet remembrance of Christ! Such is the answer which God gives, in the end, to importunate prayer.

Let us imitate the *importunity* of this woman. "For consider"—I am quoting the words of another—"consider what is signified by God requiring of us importunity in prayer. It is implied that God often hears our prayers when He seems not to hear them; that He often continues silent and answers not our request for a time; nay more, that if on such occasions we give over and cease to ask, we lose the good which He designs for us." Beyond any doubt God is "often, then, answering most when unperceived, stirring up the heart to more prayer, to stronger desires, deeper humility, greater faith." And next, let us imitate this woman in her *humility*. We must not fail to observe that the

character in which this earnest importunity is found is marked likewise with the deepest lowliness. Most of us would be inclined to complain when reminded of our disadvantages; but she accepts her disadvantages as a training for lowliness of mind. She puts forward no claim as of strict right. She hardly even asks that anything should be specially given to her. The crumbs that "fall" from the table are enough to content her. What comes accidentally, as it were, from God's large hand of bounty will suffice. She is consciously unworthy of the least of His mercies. Finally, let us imitate her *intercession*. She is not praying for herself. She is praying for another. Yet how she identifies herself with that daughter's case, and makes it her own! If there is any prayer to which this example has a peculiarly literal application, and to which it furnishes a peculiar encouragement, it is the prayer of parents for their children, when those children are "grievously vexed" by temptation and sin, by the evil spirits which invade our homes, which follow us through life, and for which the only remedy is Christ.

VIII.

STORM AND DARKNESS WITHOUT  
CHRIST.


“It was now dark, and Jesus was not come to them.”

JOHN vi. 17.



## VIII.

### STORM AND DARKNESS WITHOUT CHRIST.

OMETIMES, in Scripture narratives, the mention of a definite time of the day is a help to our obtaining a better impression of that which is described, and, with this, gives additional force and distinctness to the lesson we are intended to learn.

Thus, when we read in St. John's Gospel of our Lord being seated "on the well" in Samaria, and when we are told that He was "weary"—if we may assume here the customary New Testament mode of reckoning time—we gain something through the additional remark that it was "the sixth hour" or mid-day. In thinking of what mid-day is in that climate, of the burning sun overhead, the

hot dust on the road by which Christ and His disciples had come, the parched look of everything around, we acquire a fuller consciousness of what is meant by His weariness, and a livelier sense of the instruction connected with the refreshing water drawn up from the cool depths of the well.

Or, to turn to a very different scene, we are told, in the account of St. Paul's shipwreck, near the end of the Acts of the Apostles—when the vessel had been hastily anchored under most perilous circumstances—that the sailors and passengers—gathered together anxiously on the deck—"wished for the day." This phrase brings most vividly before us those drenched and weary men, and their eager looking towards the surf and the rocks, as the grey light began to make objects gradually visible: and thus, too, we seem to acquire a better apprehension of some of the things we are invited to learn from that passage of sacred history concerning the helplessness of man, his dependence on God's care, and, at the same time, the certainty of the fulfilment of Divine promises.

Our present subject is connected with the end of the day. In itself it is an impressive time, and predisposes us to serious thought. The feelings we have entertained concerning many things during the hours of daylight, become altered when darkness settles round us. And there is the recollection, too, that another day is gone. Perhaps time has been lost; and certainly it cannot be recalled. Perhaps unkind words have been spoken; and certainly they cannot now be unspoken. Perhaps some good has been honestly done to the best of our power; and certainly that effort, however humble, has been recorded in God's book.

There are scenes in Scripture associated with the close of the day, the impression of which derives additional emphasis from this circumstance. We may, in passing, select two from the Old Testament, very different in their details, but in this respect alike. When we read of Isaac "going to meditate in the field at eventide," we feel that we gain something from this allusion to the hour, as regards our insight into his character, as well as our power of appreciating the picturesque

arrival of Rebekah and her camels. Still more is this the case when we connect, as certainly we may, this eventide meditation of the patriarch with the thought of Sarah's recent burial, and with the "comfort after his mother's death" which his marriage brought to him. And—to turn to a very different occasion—who does not feel, after reading Micaiah's prophecy concerning "all Israel scattered upon the hills, as sheep that have not a shepherd," and then reading the account of the wounding of Ahab and the increasing "that day" of the battle in Ramoth-Gilead, how much solemnity is thrown over that dark history by remembering that "the king died at even," and that it was "about the going down of the sun" when the proclamation went through the host, saying, "Every man to his city, and every man to his own country"?

And the serious thoughts which are natural at the close of the day may be connected with passages in the life of Christ. Several such associations are ready provided for us in the New Testament, as, for instance—to take two passages found in St. Luke—where

we are told that Jesus, during that last week before His passion, "in the day-time was teaching in the Temple," and then at the close of each day, when one more opportunity had been given to the unbelieving Jews, "at night he went out, and abode in the Mount of Olives:"—or when, after the Resurrection, He joined two of His disciples as they walked towards a village "about threescore furlongs" from Jerusalem, and on approaching the village they constrained Him to stay, saying, "Abide with us: for it is toward evening, and the day is far spent:" and He did abide with them to their infinite comfort, as often He abides still, in times of sorrow and fear, with His true disciples, "when night is nigh."

But our thoughts are now to be turned to an earlier passage in the life of Christ and to a different region in the Holy Land. The Sea of Tiberias, or Lake of Gennesaret, is almost more even than the neighbourhood of Jerusalem associated with the works and with the teaching of our Saviour. The feeding of the five thousand and of the four thousand took place upon its shores. So did

the healing of the Nobleman's son, and of the Centurion's son, both of which miracles have been selected subjects for this course of Meditations: and—to add two others of the series—the healing of the demoniac among the tombs occurred on the Eastern bank of this small inland sea, and the healing of the sick woman by the way followed soon afterwards on the Western bank.

Not, however, the shores only, but the water itself of this sea speaks to every traveller of the memory of Christ. The lesson of loyalty and of obedience to public government was taught here by the piece of money in the fish's mouth. The encouragement to those who are to become "fishers of men" was given here by the net "let down at his word" and enclosing by His power "a multitude of fishes." And here too the dominion of Christ over the elements and the general laws of nature was manifested as nowhere else. Two miracles are recorded as having occurred on the waters of this lake, quite peculiar in their character, and having distinctive lessons of their own. One was the calming of the tempest which arose in the

day-time, when Jesus was present in the ship, though asleep. The other, which is our present subject, derives its significance not so much from the violence of the storm as from the fact that it was night, and that Jesus was absent.

After the miraculous feeding of one of the multitudes, St. John says that there was an intention "to take Jesus by force, to make him a king." This gives us the immediate cause why He was separated from His disciples. Any such attempt to make "his kingdom a kingdom of this world" was altogether contrary to the spirit and meaning of His mission. Those who looked merely on the surface might have thought that this would have been the readiest way to win over the Jews. But "no man's heart was ever turned to God by outward pomp and splendour." Christ's own disciples were themselves too ready to acquiesce in this mere worldly view of their Master's greatness. Thus He "constrained" them to depart, while He went into a mountain "himself alone." And it is added: "When even was now come, his disciples went down unto the

sea, and entered into a ship and went over the sea toward Capernaum; and *it was now dark, and Jesus was not come to them.*"

St. Matthew and St. Mark, who also relate this miracle, supply a further reason for this retirement. Their accounts at this point, thrown into one narrative, are as follows: "Jesus constrained his disciples to get into a ship, and to go before him unto the other side, while he sent the multitudes away. And when he had sent the multitudes away, he went up in a mountain apart *to pray*. And when even was come, the ship was in the midst of the sea, and he alone on the land."

Now let us pause here for a moment to observe the occupation of Christ at the end of the day. This touches us more closely than what we are told concerning the attempt to make Him a king. He was engaged in prayer, in solitary prayer; and great pains were taken, that He might be alone. The multitude were dispersed. The disciples themselves were absent. Is not this a most loving admonition to us as to what one of our employments should be at the approach of night? The work of the day is done. We



ought now to disentangle ourselves from the excitement, the bustle, the fatigue, the annoyance, of the business which has been engrossing us. Moreover we should secure some separation, so far as is possible, from our nearest friends, from our home-hindrances, that we may be alone with God, that we may really pray : and such solitary prayer is then needed the most, when there has been the greatest amount of active exertion, and when the day has been spent in the concourse of men.

But there was a further reason in the Saviour's mind for this temporary separation from His disciples. Though He was alone in prayer, He did not forget them. Even we ourselves are not alone, at such moments, when most alone. The Lord's Prayer enjoins us, that as we lift up our solitary supplication, we are to think of others as well as ourselves. And the adorable Saviour, in His solitude and prayer, did not forget His disciples. There were two things which He designed them to learn by experience that evening and night. For a clear perception, however, of this point we must turn to one of the other Evangelists.

St. John simply says that "the sea arose by reason of a great wind that blew:" and he adds that they were "rowing," which of course implies that the wind was "contrary." They were not able to use their sail. St. Matthew simply says that "the ship was now in the midst of the sea, tossed with waves—for the wind was contrary." But St. Mark says "that he saw them toiling in rowing; for the wind was contrary to them." This phrase at once connects their present difficulty and trouble with His loving sympathy and care. And this brings us to that special point of instruction which is proposed for consideration. "It was now dark, and Jesus was not yet come to them:" they were "toiling in rowing;" but "*He saw them.*" They had something to learn, which they could only learn effectually by means of this separation, this darkness, this toil.

In the first place He would have them fully convinced of *His goodness and power*. The miracles already worked were not sufficient, strange as this seems to us. Nothing, indeed, is more wonderful than the continued incredulity and ignorance of the disciples,

though they lived perpetually in the presence of these miracles and in the sound of their teaching: so that Christ was again and again compelled to rebuke them. "Do ye not yet understand? O ye of little faith, wherefore did ye doubt?" is the burden of many of His reproofs.

But if we wonder at the faint impressions made on them, how is it with ourselves? Is not our own habit of mind just the same? We are constantly hearing of sudden deaths, we see others all round us in deep sorrow, we are continually receiving mercies at God's hand, each day brings something which is exactly adapted to be a persuasion or a warning to our soul; and yet we are unmoved. All who watch their own hearts, and are sensible of the dull indifference of the world around, will agree that this is a true description of men in general.

And yet God perseveres. If the old methods have failed, He tries fresh methods to persuade us to trust Him. New providences, new trials, new mercies, still pursue us, notwithstanding our inconsistency and unbelief. If the feeding of the multitude is forgotten,

Jesus comes controlling the elements, and walking on the sea. The 107th Psalm occurs here naturally to the mind, when we are considering this aspect of the present miracle. "He brought down their heart through heaviness: they fell down, and there was none to help them. So when they cried unto the Lord in their trouble, he delivered them out of their distress. Oh that men would therefore praise the Lord for his goodness, and declare the wonders that he doeth for the children of men! At his word the stormy wind in the sea ariseth, which lifteth up the waves thereof. They are carried up to the heavens and down again to the deep: their soul melteth away because of the trouble. So when they cry unto the Lord, he delivered them out of their distress. For he maketh the storm to cease, so that the waves thereof are still. Then they are glad, because they are at rest; and so he bringeth them unto the haven, where they would be. Oh that men would therefore praise the Lord for his goodness, and declare the wonders that he doeth for the children of men!" These words seem almost like a commentary

on what we read in St. John's Gospel. "The sea arose by reason of a great wind that blew. So when they had rowed about five-and-twenty or thirty furlongs, they see Jesus walking on the sea, and drawing nigh unto the ship, and they were afraid. But he said unto them, It is I, be not afraid. Then they willingly received him into the ship: and immediately the ship was at the land whither they went." Even then, after Jesus entered into the ship, and "the wind ceased," St. Mark says that "they were sore amazed in themselves, and wondered: for they considered not the miracle of the loaves; for their heart was hardened."

Difficult, however, as it was for them to learn this lesson of faith, no circumstance could be better adapted to teach this lesson to them. Christ accommodated Himself to their special case. Their own sea-faring life had made them acquainted with the irresistible power of storms: and though other miracles might not have produced their due effect, this could hardly fail to leave a deep impression in the end. We cannot doubt that afterwards—in the retrospect of these

things—they would thankfully feel how much had been done to convince them of their Master's ever-present goodness and power. What was wonder once became faith afterwards. And God, too, accommodates His providences and His discipline to the special case of each one of us. How great is the gain to us, if we acquire the habit of looking back, at the close of the day, or near the close of life, and interpreting the manner of God's dealing with our souls !

But there was another thing, we may be well-assured, which they were intended to learn, and did learn in the end, viz., *their own weakness and helplessness without Christ*. St. John says they had “rowed about five-and-twenty or thirty furlongs,” when Christ came. St. Matthew says they were “in the midst” of the sea ; and this corresponds with what we know of the breadth of this sea. St. Mark says, as we have seen, that they were “toiling in rowing.” The night, too, was now far advanced. The same Evangelist adds that it was “the fourth watch of the night” when He came. In the introductory paragraphs of this paper an effort was made to

deepen the impression which this miracle is adapted to make, by calling attention to that particular portion of the twenty-four hours, with which it is associated. We have to do here with the evening and the night. If we compare the narratives of the three Evangelists carefully, we shall see that both these periods are brought before our notice. The day was already beginning to wear away, when the feeding of the multitude took place; so that it was probably already quite dark, when Jesus retired to the mountain in solitude to pray, and when the disciples began their voyage across the lake without Him. Their struggle with the elements seems to have lasted through a considerable interval, and just during the hours when the gloom is the deepest; and Jesus came, "walking on the sea," at that chilly time which intervenes between midnight and the dawning of the day.

Thus we see that there was everything to discourage and depress them. Though the voyage, which they were attempting to accomplish, was very short, they made no progress. Their own efforts were unavailing;

and whatever alarm was connected with the storm was made infinitely more formidable by the absence of daylight. This time of separation from Christ, this vain struggle in their own strength, coupled with the immediate calm, the safety and the rest, when Christ came, must often have been in their minds afterwards, while engaged in that hard Apostolic work, which certainly had its depressing and discouraging moments. It was a lesson to them for life, of their own feebleness and insufficiency; and through their experience we, too, obtain a very salutary and needful lesson for ourselves.

The drift of these remarks has been to dwell, not so much on the deliverance of the disciples from their difficulties, as on the discipline through which they passed before the deliverance came. "*It was dark, and Jesus was not yet come.*" So too, with us, very often, there is *darkness* in the soul; and, at these times, what we need is the presence of Christ. It may be well for us, however, to have felt such darkness, with all its alarm and perplexity. He who has not gone through some such experience, is not really aware of his



own helpless ignorance. He who has never feared, is not conscious of the peril which surrounds him. Christ sometimes leaves us to ourselves, that we may learn to know ourselves, and discover our need of Him. Meanwhile, His watchful eye penetrates the darkness, and sees us still; and in due time He comes to teach us that He Himself is our light.

And this life, too, like the sea of Tiberias, is very liable to *storms*. They often come suddenly, and sometimes they are violent. We find that we must struggle with temptations, with sorrow, with doubt, with a thousand hindrances and vexations: and especially, even when our efforts to do right are strongest, there are the obstacles arising from obstinate sin. "*Evil*," as St. Paul says, "*is present with us*." Nature is against us. We try to make progress, too often in our own power, against this strong resistance; and we are baffled and defeated. What we need is Christ, more simply apprehended by faith, more willingly received into the weak and storm-tossed and endangered ship.

There is another application, which is very

frequent, and very lawful and instructive, alike of this miracle and of the other instance of assuaging a storm at sea. The ship is symbolical of the Church. The waves, which threaten to overwhelm and sink it, are the tumults, persecutions, profaneness and depravity of the world. The fierce wind is the hostile power of Evil Spirits. The crew are the weak ministers of the Gospel, who vainly endeavour to steer the ship aright, and to make progress through the storm. Meanwhile, Christ appears to be altogether absent, or, if present, to take no heed. True illustrations might be given in this way of many passages of Church history. These slight Meditations, however, on the Miracles of Christ are intended to have reference to the trials of individual faith, and the operation of grace in the soul. Each of these works of wonder has its own special message of admonition or mercy; and what we learn here is, that in the close presence of Christ, and thus only, have we success after struggle, light in the midst of darkness, and calm after storm.

IX.


THE LEPER'S PRAYER.

“If thou wilt, thou canst.”

MATT. viii. 2.

## IX.

### THE LEPER'S PRAYER.

 HIS sentence reminds us of one of our commonest proverbs ; and before we proceed further, it is well worth our while to pause for a moment within the region of our own poor human "will" and "can," that we may be the better able to appreciate the difference between ourselves and the great Lord and Saviour.

Of ourselves we say, and of one another, that "where there is a will there is a way;" that if we "will," we "can." But in this case it is to be observed that the "can" is viewed as arising out of the "will." Either because a vigorous resolution braces us up to do that which otherwise it would be impossible to do, or because, in such a state of

mind, we become quick-sighted in regard to modes of achieving success which otherwise would be unseen, we acquire new ability through an effort of will; but no claim is put forward to the possession of any inherent absolute power, as always existing within us. All that we mean is this, that in proportion as we are resolute the power comes; and we know very well that such power, in our own case, is restricted within very narrow limits indeed.

It is quite different in the case of Christ. The possession of power is the very fundamental starting-point from which we must view all His actions as proceeding. The only question raised here by the leper is in regard to the will of Christ. The leper, in his misery, says to Christ this: "Certainly Thou canst: of this there is no doubt. My only fear is lest Thy will should impose limitations on the power which is present. If Thou willest to exert this power, then my delivery is sure." The faith of the suppliant indicates a true appreciation of the facts of the case. Christ has infinite reserves of power which He does not use. His power does not come forth

from His will, but lies, so to speak, underneath the will. The power is deep down below the depths of that mysterious union of the two wills, Divine and human, which constitutes the volition of Christ.

The leper has learnt much in a short time; and now let us learn something from him.

It is evident that the healing of this man is intended to have a prominent place in the Gospel history. It stands forth early in the order of the miracles. In fact we may call it the earliest in the miracles of healing: for though there is mention of healing before the Sermon on the Mount, this is the first case which is specified by St. Matthew in its particulars; and it seems, too, to have occurred instantly at the close of the Sermon on the Mount, so that, while the one arrests us as the sample of Christ's direct teaching, this arrests us as the sample of His teaching by Miracles.

It appears probable that the leper had been listening on the outskirts of the multitude, coming as near as he durst so as not to touch even the garment of another. The tones of that voice seem to have reached his ear; the

power of that teaching to have sunk into his heart ; and when the Lord came down from the Mount, the poor outcast approached and worshipped Him. What this means we know from the corresponding narratives of St. Mark and St. Luke, the former of whom says that he “fell down on his knees” before Him, the latter that he “fell on his face” before Him ; and his prayer, given identically by all three Evangelists, is, “Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean.”

This opens out our subject : and the first questions which meet us are these : What was leprosy ? And how are we to view it, when we are seeking to derive from this particular incident instruction for ourselves ? When we have inquired into these points, we will briefly consider the characteristics of the leper’s prayer, and the characteristics of Christ’s gracious answer to the prayer. Then two closing remarks will bring us to the limits of our space, and will give to us materials for serious and useful thought.

(i.) First, then, the characteristics of leprosy as set before us in Holy Scripture. It is certainly not an easy subject to deal with



completely; but there are some popular impressions in regard to it which it is desirable to remove. I do not mean that we are to enter into the subject in any medical sense. This is not necessary, nor would it lead to any religious benefit.

There seems no doubt that the leprosy of Scripture was a loathsome and distressing cutaneous disease, disfiguring the person, and rendering the presence of the patient painful to the beholder. But still I imagine there is great doubt whether it is to be exactly identified with that dreadful malady which modern travellers describe as sometimes witnessed in the East—that living death, in which the joints of the body drop off, and the flesh of the face consumes away, till the very semblance of humanity seems to be lost. The notices of leprosy which we have in the Bible—and they are frequent—do not harmonise with this impression. And again, as to the supposed contagiousness of the disease,—this character might have belonged to it in some cases; but certainly in these Scriptural notices this is quite in the background. Nor is it easy to reconcile the

fear of contagion with the provisions of the Levitical law, according to which the priests were required to come in personal contact with the leper; or to reconcile it with the rules enacted concerning the furniture of houses infected with leprosy. We should make a great mistake if we were to consider these regulations and these offices of the priests as simply like the duties of a sanitary commission. The whole dealing with the matter is clearly viewed as moral and ceremonial, rather than medical. No mention is made of physicians, but only of priests. The offerings which were prescribed when recovery had taken place, point clearly to a religious meaning.

Such historical cases, too, as those of Miriam and Gehazi carry their own explanation. Each example of leprosy was, if not a judgment for sin in the particular instance, yet an emblem of sin for the warning of all men—an unequivocal assertion of the presence of that mysterious moral evil which cleaves to us, and which separates us from God—a visible command that we “cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh,” nay,

—to quote from St. Jude some words in which there may possibly be an allusion to this very subject of leprosy—that we “hate even the garment spotted by the flesh.”

Leprosy, then, contemplated thus, is an expressive and most serious image of sin. By appearing among the Jewish people, it did not allow them to forget the deep sore of human society, however hidden it might otherwise be to the outward view. It called attention to the true cause of human suffering; it reiterated the sentence of condemnation which rests on the human race; and the instances of leprosy which occurred in the course of the history of the Jewish people carried on the lesson continually from the times of the Old Testament to the times of the New. In one respect, indeed, as the history thus advanced, another Revelation was made manifest. In the Old Testament leprosy sets sin before us chiefly in its misery; in the New Testament chiefly in reference to its remedy. Here, in these miracles of the Gospel-time, we see what Christ is to humanity and to each separate sinful human soul. The

more we think of it, the more we see it to be a significant fact, that just as St. Matthew exhibits Christ's doctrine as beginning in the Sermon on the Mount, so the first miracle which he specifies is the healing of a leper.

The condition of such a sufferer, if not hopeless, was peculiarly helpless. It was removed, as we have seen, out of the ordinary range of the physician's care. In the case of this malady we seem to touch the moral and spiritual world more directly than in the case of any other maladies which were brought before the healing power of Christ, more even than in the case of death itself. All those other cases were matters of course. There was something exceptional in this. As the solitary leper knelt there, and fell on his face before Christ, all the circumstances of the occasion seemed to say, That for which a cure is needed here is *Sin*. Not that he was himself a worse sinner than other Jews; but he was, as it were, the representative of sinful humanity in the presence of Christ.

(ii.) And as we pass on to the prayer of the

leper and the answer of Christ, it is desirable to notice two aspects of the subject which have special instruction for us when we begin to apply the matter, each for himself, to our own spiritual condition. In every separate instance of the healing done by Christ, the weakness and sinfulness of man is exhibited in some characteristic manner; and in the instance before us there seem to me to be two marks which it is highly important that we should observe carefully.

First, the position of this leper was a position of *shame and disgrace*. He inspired repugnance in those around him: and he was taught to feel it quite natural that he should inspire this feeling. Such, too, ought to be our view of sin. Sin is a *disgrace*. Sin is a blot upon our humanity. Sin is not merely the breach of a commandment—not merely the cause of misery—not merely a disturbance in the harmony of God's world—it is hateful, abominable. It ought to fill us with *shame*.

But there is a second particular in which leprosy was distinguished from all the other maladies that were healed by Christ. Other

maladies, by the very fact of their existence, invited sympathy and help and society. But the leper was an isolated man. Everything reminded him that he was *alone in the world*. If he went into the synagogue, a vacant space was made round him. If he walked abroad, he went with dishevelled hair, with a garment covering his chin, and crying out, "Unclean, unclean," lest anyone by accident should touch him.

Now there is a striking thought concerning the human soul, which, in our busy social life, is very apt to fade away from the remembrance. It is the thought of *the soul's solitude*. Each one of us is alone before God. However great may be the human crowd in which we live, however closely we may be connected with one another by affection, by interest, by duty, each soul is solitary in its relation to God. Just as in those great American forests, which stretch in vast succession over mountain and plain—whatever be the interlacing of the foliage—whatever be the beauty which comes from the blending of sunlight and shade—whatever havoc may be done on a great and extensive scale by storm

and tempest—each tree, rising from its own root, with its one stem, and with the outgrowth of its own branches, is a solitary tree. So is the human soul, with the outgrowth of its own words and deeds, a solitary soul. No other human soul can share its responsibility. Alone before God—it lives through this life, and passes on to the next. Meditate upon this fact—and it requires some meditation to realise this momentous fact—and combine with the thought of the soul's solitude the remembrance that the soul is pervaded by sin: and you begin to reach some part of the deep meaning of that interview which took place when the Sermon on the Mount was over, when the solitary leper said, "Lord! if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean," and the Lord said, "I will: be thou clean."

(iii.) "*If thou wilt, thou canst.*" The characteristics of this man's faith, and the example which it contains for ourselves, can very easily be pointed out.

There was, in the first place, a thorough consciousness of his own misery, and a perfect conviction of his own helplessness. The case was as bad as it could be. It would seem

that the leprosy, in this instance, had assumed a peculiarly malignant and aggravated form. St. Luke, in his medical manner, adds something to St. Matthew's narrative, and tells us that the man was "full of leprosy." In himself, and in medical help, he had no hope. Nothing less than Christ could save him.

Yet, bad as the case was, he knew it was not too bad for Christ to deal with successfully. It has been well said that the language of Faith always is, not "if thou canst," but "if thou wilt." And this man had a perfect unshaken conviction of the power of Christ. Whether the Divine force of the teaching on the Mount had come irresistibly into his mind, or in whatever way the secret influence of Divine grace had won possession of his heart, the conviction was there. And we shall see this characteristic feature of his faith more clearly, if we contrast the record of this miracle with the record of another, which occurred also on a marked occasion. When Jesus came down from the Mount of Transfiguration, He found a man who had brought his son, possessed with an evil spirit, to be



healed by the disciples. In that case the prayer of the distressed father was—"If thou *canst* do anything, have compassion on us, and help us:" and the answer was—"If thou *canst* believe, all things are possible to him that believeth." In this case the suppliant had faith, absolute faith, in Christ's power: and the answer was what we shall presently consider.

But observe now the concentrated force which resides in the leper's petition. Observe, too, his entire resignation. He is willing to leave the whole matter in Christ's hands. He throws the whole burden of the responsibility on Him. Here are the true marks of a strong and effectual faith. It was just like the faith of Abraham, who, "by faith, when he was tried, offered up Isaac, and he that received the promises offered up his only-begotten son, of whom it was said that in Isaac shall thy seed be called: accounting that God was able to raise him up even from the dead; from whence also he did receive him in a figure."

"Accounting that God was *able*"—"If thou wilt, thou *canst*." Let us pause on this

little word "*if*," as we pass on to our last point.

This little word "*if*" embodies in itself both fear and hope : and it may embody them in very various proportions. When we have no hope at all, we do not say "*if*;" and when we are sure that all is absolutely settled, we do not say "*if*." When David knew for certain that his child was dead, he returned to his usual employments, and threw off the state of mind which was expressed in the words, "Who knoweth if the Lord will be gracious?" When Peter, under the guidance of the angel, had passed the first and the second ward, and through the iron gate, and through one street, then he said to himself—"Now I know of a surety that the Lord hath delivered me." He no longer feared that it was all a dream. "*If*" implies doubt : and faith, in its early stages, almost always involves doubt. But the soul that has reached the stage when it can use "*if*," has already made great progress—and further progress may be expected to be made ; so that the fear becomes less and less, and the hope more and more. It will be observed that in this

case the fear relates only to one point—not to Christ's power, but to His will: and this brings us to the answer of Christ.

(iv.) "*I will: be thou clean.*" I spoke of the concentration of the leper's prayer. But what a Divine concentration there is in the answer! "*I will: be thou clean.*" What a majestic utterance! And what our own language gives us here so forcibly in five words, is given by the original Greek in two, which probably could not, with equal force, be rendered into any modern language. Christ accepts the recognition of His power. This is a fact to be noted with the utmost attention. Christ's whole manner in the working of His miracles separates Him off from all those who were enabled to work miracles in His name. However difficult the case may be, He accepts it without hesitation. The weight of this man's misery, and responsibility of healing what no one else could heal, are thrown upon Christ alone: and He is able to bear the burden, and instantly to do what is needed. "*I will.*"

It is most impressive thus to see Him, who was the lowliest and meekest, the

servant of all, calmly conscious of His power, and asserting it to the full. So it is in all His miracles. "It is I—be not afraid," He says to the terrified disciples in the storm. "I go to awake him out of sleep" is His word, when Lazarus is dead. All that He requires is, that the conditions of the case shall be such, that faith may have its exercise, and that God may be glorified. "*If he will, he can.*"

The main point of the answer is, not His *power* but His *will*. His will is challenged here, and He instantly gives the response which was sought for. Nor is He simply content with doing the miracle and healing the disease. But with decisive brevity He speaks the words "I will." He takes up in a moment the very point of the suppliant's doubt. He strengthens the weak part of his faith. And, as He speaks, He stretches forth His hand: and the leper is healed:—and in so doing He gives us an assurance of what His will is toward us. That hand is outstretched still:—and so far from receiving pollution by the touch, it communicates purity and health. He declares to us, that

on our application to Him, with a full conviction of His power, the invisible hand of mercy will be stretched out to heal the foul places of our sins.

Do we need anything more to assure us? It is found in one addition which St. Mark makes to the narrative as given by St. Matthew. The second Evangelist states not merely the power and the will of Jesus, but His motive—"Jesus," he says, "*moved with compassion*, put forth his hand, and touched him, and said, I will: be thou clean.'

*Compassion!* It is the special attribute of Christ. We began with thinking of the will and the power of Christ, and we remembered that His power does not in any way, as ours often does, depend upon the will, but that the power is inherent and absolute. Here, however, is something which, as we read, affects the heart more closely. To those who are deeply conscious of their sins, there is no encouragement in the thought of a power that is irresistible. Nor is there full encouragement even in the thought of a will which, once set in motion, goes straight and infallibly to its mark. But when with perfect power,

and with a ready will, we know that loving compassion is combined, then we hope—then we trust—then we are confident that our sins will be healed.

We were to end with two remarks, which concern every one of us, and the omission of which would leave our consideration of this subject altogether imperfect, as regards our spiritual benefit.

The first is this, which has been said a thousand times, that we must come *with our leprosy* direct to Christ, in the prayer of faith. However bad the case may be, it is essential that we trust it confidently and absolutely to Him. This leper is the image of every one of us. We gain nothing, we lose much, we may lose everything, by imagining our case to be less serious than it is. He alone is able to heal us. But He can, and He will—He and He alone can so touch us, as not only to incur no pollution, but Himself to communicate purity and health.

The other remark is perhaps less obvious. But we may without presumption draw an example to ourselves from the answer which Christ gave to the leper's prayer. In the

services which we are called to render to one another we fail far oftener from want of will than want of power. Those around us are more dependent, for their happiness, upon our sympathy and good-will, than upon our great resources and strength. And what a multitude of opportunities we have, which we never use, not because we *can not*, but because we *will not*!

Oh for something of that *compassion*, which moved the Saviour's will, so that He put His power into gracious exercise! Even in regard to rescuing others from sinful courses, we are able to do more than we commonly do. We indeed have no power of healing sin, in the proper sense of the word: nor can we be sure of touching the leprosy of sin, without the risk of being infected ourselves. It is very needful to exercise judgment and discrimination in all such efforts. We are probably safe, when we are sure that we have compassion for the sinner and that we hate the sin. Again we may refer to that same sentence from St. Jude: "Of some have compassion, making a difference: and others save with fear, pulling them out

of the fire, hating even the garment spotted by the flesh." But in soothing sorrow, in alleviating care, in giving a helping hand at the critical moment,—who is there amongst us but must confess that if we had more compassion, there would be more resolute efforts, a quicker insight, larger resources? And which of us dares to deny that "*if we will, we can?*"



X.


THE LEPER'S THANKSGIVING.

**“Were there not ten cleansed? but where are the nine?”**

**LUKE xvii. 17.**

## X.

### THE LEPER'S THANKSGIVING.

UR last subject was a *Leper's Prayer*. One of the Hebrew sufferers under that mysterious malady of leprosy—after hanging apparently on the outskirts of the crowd which listened to the Sermon on the Mount—approached Christ when the sermon was over, fell down before Him, worshipped Him, and implored His help. The burden and the argument of his prayer was this: “Lord, *if thou wilt, thou canst.*” In the power of Christ he had evidently full confidence. If he had known all the compassion of Christ, he would have had full confidence also in His will. But he hoped that will would be exerted in his favour: and he said, “Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean.”

The Lord graciously took the suppliant's words, as it were, and made them His own: "I will: be thou clean:" and, saying this, He touched him; and immediately the leprosy was healed. And hence there results to us a permanent record of the compassion of Christ, of His will towards us who are sinners, of the comforting fact that His resources of Divine power are at our disposal, if only we possess the grace of living faith.

Now the subject to which the reader's attention is asked is a *Leper's Thanksgiving*. The miracle out of which the following thoughts arise is different from the other. Among our Lord's works of healing, two instances relate to this disease: and these two miracles, in fact, complete the allusions of the New Testament to leprosy. That which has so prominent a place in the Old Testament, as a symbol of the misery and curse of sin, is just so far carried on into the New, as to be twice presented to us, prominently and forcibly, in connection with Christ, who heals all this misery, who Himself took the curse of sin, and removes it from us. There is no need for repeating what was said before con-

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cerning leprosy, except just to say this, that the Mosaic laws in regard to it were not by any means simply what we call the regulations of a sanitary commission, but, on the contrary, had chiefly a religious meaning, and that the disease was intended to be viewed with horror by the Jews, not because it was infectious, or because it was disfiguring, but because it expressed—not necessarily in each particular patient, but in its general import—God's displeasure against sin, as well as the polluting and shocking nature of sin. And it is evident that the more we take this meaning of the subject deep into our minds, the more we see the significance of Christ's work in the healing.

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symbolizes  
Sin.

Nor need we follow the same train of religious thought as before. The Miracles of Christ give us starting-points for very diverse trains of thought. Both in themselves and in the circumstances under which they were worked, they are so various, that they suggest lessons of the utmost variety. As in nature, so in grace, though law is always discoverable in God's working, there is no monotony in that working. As regards these two instances

of the healing of leprosy, a difference at first sight arises between them from the fact that the former relates to a solitary leper, who was quite isolated, the latter to one of a group of men, who had been suffering similarly to himself. And we shall be able to gain some distinctive instruction for ourselves, by considering the leper, first in his companionship with the others, and next in his contrast with them,—a contrast which comes into view precisely because of that companionship.

As regards the facts of the case, they lie quite simply before us on this page of St. Luke's Gospel. In the other instance, in order to gain a knowledge of all the circumstances, we are obliged to compare the accounts of three Evangelists. Here we have the whole case between the 11th and 19th verses in the seventeenth chapter of this one Evangelist :—"It came to pass, as he went to Jerusalem, that he passed through the midst of Samaria and Galilee. And, as he entered into a certain village, there met him ten men that were lepers, which stood afar off : and they lifted up their voices and said, Jesus, Master, have mercy on us. And when

he saw them, he said unto them, Go show yourselves unto the priests. And it came to pass that, as they went, they were cleansed. And one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, and with a loud voice glorified God, and fell down on his face at his feet, giving him thanks: and he was a Samaritan. And Jesus answering said, Were there not ten cleansed? but where are the nine? there are not found that returned to give glory to God, save this stranger. And he said unto him, Arise, go thy way: thy faith hath made thee whole."

This incident belongs to a later period of our Lord's ministry than that other interview just after the delivery of the Sermon on the Mount. He was now on His way to Jerusalem for the last time: and it is important to observe what is said here concerning Galilee and Samaria: for in fact it is out of the relation subsisting between these two regions that part of the instruction of the occasion arises. We need not inquire whether He was passing along the border-line of these regions, so as to travel on beyond them both, and so proceed towards Jerusalem by

the other side of the Jordan, or whether He journeyed first through Galilee and then through Samaria, so as to reach Judæa by the shortest route. The points of importance are that He was near the frontier between the two, that there He met these ten lepers, that, while one of them was a Samaritan, the others, or at least some of them, were Jews.

I First let us consider these men simply in  
*compan-* their companionship. They were all outcasts  
*ship of the* from society : but, for a time, they formed a  
*hers.* small society among themselves. Each saw the shame and humiliation of the others. Each was conscious of the misery of the others. To have companions in sorrow is very often a relief, but not always. I doubt whether it was so in this instance. The solitary leper in the other instance might, I could well believe, have found some alleviation in his very solitude, in living aloof from all men, in thinking that his dishonour was forgotten. But here human eyes were upon the misery and shame of each. We can of course only speculate on such feelings ; but by speculating in this way we gain a keener

(a) trouble



sense of the reality of the suffering: and it is allowable here to give an illustration drawn from an Italian city among the Alps, which it is natural to recall in connection with this incident of the Bible. There is a tower in Aosta called "The Lepers' Tower:" and it is said that a brother and sister, both lepers, lived there, till first one died and then the other. The sister could not bear to see the brother nor the brother the sister. But they spoke to each other through trellis-work covered by foliage. Now, as was remarked before, we are not to assume that the leprosy of Scripture was necessarily accompanied by that hideous deformity, and that decay of the flesh and of the very bones, which is said sometimes to mark in modern days the disease known by that name. But this slight allusion is enough to show that, in such cases, companionship, if in one sense a consolation, in another sense may intensify suffering.

Passing on from this point, and bearing in mind that leprosy was an emblem of sin, a very dreadful thought presents itself to the mind. Sin is one thing:—community in sin

*suggests  
companionship  
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—conscious community in sin—is another. If we follow in imagination the passing of the human souls, through the grave, into the next world, one of the most painful, most awful, reflections is to picture to ourselves the meeting of those souls which have been consciously associated in sin here. To meet in that world, where the satisfaction and enjoyment of sin is hopelessly gone—and to remember, for instance, how fraud was concerted in this world—or how deliberate tyranny was arranged and practised—or how the allurements of vice were so contrived as to corrupt the young—this must be one of the deepest depths of Hell. When we read the Acts of the Apostles, we ought to think—not merely of the sin and death of Ananias and Sapphira—but of their waking again in the next world—of their *meeting* in that world and remembering their hypocrisy before the Church, and the fraud they had attempted against God. And the reading of the Gospels supplies another instance still more appalling, in the thought of such as Herod and Herodias meeting in that other world—with the remembrance of their foul disgrace—of the

murder in which they had joined—of the instigation of that young daughter to rejoice in the sight of a prophet's blood. The misery of the solitary soul in its remembrance of sin is dreadful: but more dreadful still is the consciousness of community in sin—a consciousness still surviving, though all that could be gained by the commission of sin is absolutely and for ever gone. Let this reflection find a place in our minds, while we are thinking of these ten men on the borders of Samaria and Galilee. Let companionship in leprosy suggest, for awful and salutary warning, companionship in sin.

But to return now to the *literal facts* of the companionship of those men; it is instructive to see, as illustrated in their case, how those who seem most naturally separated, come together, and understand one another, in the presence of a great calamity. Minor differences are sunk, when the suffering borne by all is great. Here the Jew and the Samaritan, conscious of their common misery, forget their quarrel. Is not this sometimes the case in our experience of life? Does not the sense of sorrow sometimes cause us to feel our

brotherhood? And is it not good for us thus to find our hard distinctions—our foolish distinctions—one among another—somewhat obliterated? Surely, yes! Even if the suffering be keen, and the discipline hard to bear, the lesson of humility, learnt in this way, is cheaply learnt; and especially if the Pharisee may thus discover that he is on the same level with the Publican—if any of us may discover that we are all alike in our natural sin and misery, when we stand together in the presence of the Almighty, All-holy God.

But another point now comes to view. As Jesus entered this village, these unhappy men “lifted up their voices” together and “said, Jesus, Master, have mercy upon us.”

(6). *They were alike in their prayer.* Their voices use the same language. Their eyes are turned to the same Christ. They all make the same profession. Who could, at that moment, have drawn any distinction among them? No one, at that moment, could have had the right to draw any distinction. It was then just as it is now. Men come in large numbers to church. They say the

same Creed,—“Jesus, Master”—“I believe in Jesus Christ our Lord”—they all ask for mercy—they all say that they are sinners—“Lord, have mercy upon us, miserable sinners.” Who can discriminate? No one has any right to discriminate. But these Gospel stories put principles before us—exhibit, too, these principles in action—in such a way as to aid us in discriminating for ourselves in regard to our own characters. We shall presently see that, closely as these ten men were associated together in *companionship*, one was sharply separated from the rest in *contrast*; and we are seriously invited to ask whether we ourselves resemble the one or the nine. First, however, two other points are to be observed, in which all the ten were alike.

They were alike in the mercies which they <sup>(2) in the bless</sup> received. “It came to pass that, as they went, they were cleansed.” “Jesus said, Were there not *ten* cleansed?” Here let us mark, by the way, how perfectly Jesus knew all that happened to them—how He followed them in mind and thought, on their way to the priests. And God watches the effect of

His mercy upon us. He sees how we receive it. He marks what influence it has on our character. Meanwhile, that mercy is lavishly, freely, poured out. He causes His sun to rise, He sends His fruitful rain, on the just and the unjust. He allows us the use of the same powers—He equally supplies the wants of all—recovery from sickness is granted quite as frequently to the bad as to the good—and what is more important, the remedial blessings of the Gospel are placed within the reach of all—as certainly, like the ten lepers, we are all alike in need of that remedy.

(d) But then, once more, we must observe that they were all alike in their obedience to the command. There was none of the fault-finding spirit, which we remember in that leper of the Old Testament, Naaman the Syrian, who said of the prophet, “Behold, I thought that he would strike his hand over the place, and call upon the name of his God, and heal the leper,” and who went away indignant, because of the extreme simplicity of the command that was given. These ten lepers on the borders of Galilee and Samaria did immediately what they were told to do. If they

o-bedi-ence

had heard, as they might well have heard, of the healing of that other leper in an earlier part of the Lord's ministry, they might have known that, in that case, Jesus "put forth his hand, and touched him, and said, Be thou clean." They might have been disappointed, or even vexed, like Naaman, that this was not done in their case. But there is no symptom of any such rebellious or disputatious spirit. The obedience is prompt, and decorous, and uniform. This reminds us that men will go a long way in orderly obedience to God's commands, and in the uniform discharge of duties, even when there is no real devotion of heart, so long as their interest coincides with the path that they are following. "When Jesus saw them, he said unto them, Go show yourselves to the priests." This was the one essential requirement of the Jewish law, in order to the attestation of the cure of the leprosy, and for the restoration to society of those who had suffered from that malady. Jesus strictly observes this requirement. Though He will work a miracle, He will cause no confusion,

He will excite no scandal. All shall be orderly and without excitement. And they, on their part, strictly obey. "And it came to pass, that, as they went, they were cleansed."

But here we come to the point of separation. Here the divergence begins. Here the thankful Samaritan disentangles himself from his Jewish companions, and stands out clear in his own character, as they indeed in theirs. Having dwelt on some of the thoughts which suggest themselves on considering the companionship of these men, we will now fix our attention on the lesson which arises from *their sharp separation and contrast*.

"One of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, and with a loud voice glorified God, and fell down on his face at his feet, giving him thanks; and he was a Samaritan."

He turns back, while they proceed in literal obedience to the command. They do what they are told to do. He does what his heart, warm within him, impels him to do. He does not hesitate to separate himself from them. He does not allow the force of any



argument derived from their example. He does not stay to consider what his companions will say. They are men of routine. He is a man of enthusiasm. They will go to offer the formal sacrifices. He will do the same : but will first begin with the sacrifice of thanksgiving, which alone can make those formal sacrifices acceptable. And he does this without delay. Some have supposed that he, like the rest, went first to the priests, obtained from them a certificate of health and purity, offered the customary sacrifices, and then returned to give his thanks to Christ. This sounds suspiciously like the commentary of a Pharisee, who puts observances in the first place, and the religious service of the heart in the second place—which, in fact, is to put it nowhere. Such a view is quite inconsistent with the whole spirit of the narrative and with the evident enthusiasm of the man.

And when we have gone thus far in tracing the distinction between him and the rest, may we not go further? *His* example we see that *they* do not follow. Is it not very

- (1) evident that, feeling now their health restored, they are full of impatience to have their certificate of health, that they may return to society, that they may be in the world again, may enjoy once more their amusements, may absorb themselves once more in their business? And may we not go a little further still?
- (2) Are they not very glad to have all their past shame and misery, as soon as possible, forgotten? Are they not very unwilling to take any public step to call attention to the fact that they ever had this foul disease? Oh, how these Gospel stories hold up the glass to human nature and show us what we are! And how the force of the lesson is increased by our remembering that the ingratitude was greatest where the religious advantages were the highest! *He that turned back was a Samaritan.*

Had he indeed not turned back, we should not have ventured to blame any of the ten. They were told to go to the priests: and they did go: and there the matter would have ended. But this bright out-standing exception makes the others sink down at once to a

low dead average level. Some indeed might argue—and so the Pharisees did argue, again and again, during our Lord's life on earth—that the command ought to have been literally obeyed, and that this enthusiasm was disobedience. But Christ always rebuked this triviality of the popular religion. God will have “mercy, not sacrifice.” One impulse of a thankful heart is more acceptable to Him than ten thousand religious functions, however costly and sumptuous they may be. And is it not quite evident that this must be the true scale of proportion by which to reckon all such subjects? It is enthusiasm which makes martyrs, enthusiasm which makes missionaries, enthusiasm which sustains a man in hard toil under heavy discouragement, and enables him bravely to resist the world.

The true meaning of the occurrence has been so well seized and summed up by one of our old divines, that the temptation to quote some of his sentences is irresistible. Bishop Hall says, in one of his well-known *Contemplations on the New Testament*—

*Mr. Hall.* "This miracle, indifferently wrought upon all, is differently taken. All went forward, according to the appointment, toward the priests; all were obedient; one only was thankful. All were cured; all saw themselves cured; their sense was alike; their hearts were not alike. What could make the difference, but grace?" And, again, further on, he exclaims—"O noble pattern of thankfulness! what speed of retribution is here! No sooner doth he see his cure, than he hastes to acknowledge it. The benefit shall not die, nor sleep in his hand. He stands not still, but puts himself to the pains of a return. And what a hearty recognition of the blessing! His voice was not more loud in his suit than in his thanks. And what a humble reverence of his Benefactor! he falls down at His feet, as acknowledging at once beneficence and unworthiness. It were happy for all Israel, if they would but learn of this Samaritan." And then again, with regard to the point which was touched above—"This man is sent with the rest to the priests. He well knew this

duty a branch of the law of ceremonies, which he meant not to neglect; but his heart told him there was a moral duty of professing thankfulness to his Benefactor, which called for his first attendance. First, therefore, he turns back ere he will stir forward. Reason taught this Samaritan, and us in him, that ceremony must yield to substance; and that main points of obedience must take place of all ritual compliments."

But in truth there is no need of our reasoning on such a point, or of quoting the words of old writers, however wise or forcible they may be. The question of our Lord settles the case. "Were there not ten cleansed? but *where are the nine?*" Nothing could be more clear as an approbation of the thankful leper—nothing more decisive as a rebuke of the thankless nine.

And when the question of Christ is pressed home in its application to ourselves, let no one try to turn the sharp edge of the rebuke aside by saying that this instance, which we have been considering, is quite exceptional, and that it presents no true resemblance to

X<sup>t</sup> condemn  
the 9 lepers

Our case is  
very similar  
to that of  
9 lepers.

God's dealing with us in regard to the common mercies of life. Nay: but the resemblance is very close,—so close, that, when we try to gather up all the instruction of the miracle, it seems quite natural to lay chief stress on its rebuke of our unthankfulness for common mercies. For what are the facts of the case? If we revert to what was said before concerning the companionship of these men, we shall remember that absolutely the same mercy was granted to all and in the same way. Yet only one was thankful. So God pours forth on all of us His mercies throughout our life—kindly, freely—as was said above: and yet how few are thankful!

*Where are the nine?* "Where are the nine?" They are not far to seek. They are to be found in every crowd of men, wherever assembled: and nowhere more easily, than in our great congregations which assemble for public worship. God's mercies are bestowed largely and universally. Yet unthankfulness is everywhere the general rule.

*no tests of thankfulness,* There are two tests by which this assertion may be brought to the proof.

I

Christ Himself has instituted a sacred ordinance, one special meaning of which is that there we join in thanksgiving for the greatest of God's mercies—yet how small a proportion of our congregations in church are regular communicants? No one indeed asserts that this is an infallible test. Some are communicants, who have no true preparation of heart, and whose lives are not truly Christian. Others are kept away by ignorance, by mistakes, by a timidity which rests on no sound foundation, and are better Christians than some of those who are seen punctually at the table of the Lord. Still, on the whole, the test is practically sufficient, when applied to a large congregation; and some readers may feel that they themselves are touched, when the Lord in this way puts the question to them: "Where are the nine?"

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II

And the other test is found in the general tenor of the life. True thankfulness is shown, not by words, but in actions. Thankful is that thankful does. God's mercy is like a stream, running clear and fresh, and blessing

In activ  
life.

our life every day. And in how many cases can it be said that there is a corresponding stream of active, willing, cheerful service, coming forth from a grateful heart, and showing God's praise in beneficence to man? If we desire to raise the estimate, as of course we must, to the very highest point consistent with facts, can we possibly say that the proportion is even as great as one in ten?



XI.

CHRIST IN OUR HOSPITALS.

“He commanded that something should be given  
her to eat.”

MARK v. 43.

## XI.

### CHRIST IN OUR HOSPITALS.



WE are not left in the dark as to the mind of Jesus Christ in reference to human suffering and human sickness. He was pleased to connect a very large part of His religious teaching with words of sympathy and works of healing. In setting Himself before us as the Remedy for sin, and the Physician of the soul, He is very careful to remind us that He feels, and would have us to feel, for the pain and disease and sorrow which, directly and indirectly, are the consequence of sin.

This combination is presented to us in the very early part of St. Matthew's narrative of His ministry, where we are told that Jesus "cast out the spirits with his word, and

healed all that were sick : that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying, *Himself took our infirmities and bare our sicknesses.*" No doubt it would miserably dwarf the meaning of these words, if we were to limit them to compassion for the sufferings of the body. But that the mind of Christ in regard to those sufferings is expressed in them, there cannot be a question. And though, in our present course of *Meditations on His Miracles*, use has been made of these acts of healing, for the most part, to illustrate the spiritual blessings which He confers on the soul, the series would hardly be complete, unless we were to read in at least some one of those occurrences an admonition concerning our own duty towards bodily suffering. This, then, is our subject in the present instance. Hospitals for the sick are one of the outgrowths of Christianity. In hospitals, rightly viewed, we see Christ admonishing us to follow His example, and to heal the sick.

St. Matthew, very soon after writing what has been quoted above, proceeds to relate the occurrence which is chosen as the basis of

the following remarks. But St. Mark, as his manner is, records the incidents of the occasion with more of detail, and far more vividly. We will follow therefore, in this case, the sentences of St. Mark. Each one of them reveals to us something of the mind of Christ, and therefore sets before us something which should be a pattern for our own feeling and conduct.

It is hardly necessary to recount all the circumstances at length. The "damsel" on whom the miracle was worked, was the daughter of Jairus, the ruler of a synagogue at Capernaum. She was a child of about twelve years old; and, as St. Luke tells us, with much feeling, she was the ruler's "only daughter." A dangerous illness was now ending fatally. The child was evidently sinking. No hope of recovery remained. The father was in great distress: but he believed that Jesus could help him. He met Him on the way—"and besought him greatly, saying, My little daughter lieth at the point of death. I pray thee come and lay thy hands on her, that she may be healed; and she shall live." Jesus does not appear

to have *said* anything: but He “arose and went.” While, however, they were proceeding to the house, messengers came to say that the child was dead. *Then the Saviour spoke.* “As soon as Jesus heard the word that was spoken, he saith unto the ruler of the synagogue, Be not afraid, only believe.” Both the *silence* and the words of Jesus Christ are significant; and we should observe the *time* when He spoke, as well as the words which He used. In all these narratives of the miracles of our Lord and Saviour, the smaller incidents, and the mode and order of proceeding, should be most carefully and reverently noted—for they reveal to us much of His mind and character: just as the expression of a friend’s countenance is marked by a manner and attitude, and by delicate lines of feature, which indeed we could hardly define.

(i.) But now, to single out a few things which are less minute, and most evidently significant, I would ask, in the first place, that notice may be taken of this, that Jesus here showed a deep interest in one who was very young. One marked characteristic of

our Saviour, during His life on earth, was His love of children. When some foolish and ambitious people were disputing which of them should be the greatest, He placed "a young child" in the midst of them; and that innocent unsuspecting face preached the sermon. He warned those who stood by that one of the greatest sins we can possibly commit is the corruption of a young child by our example: and He added that young children constitute, as it were, an unbroken link between earth and heaven, through the angels who take care of them, and who are always in communication with God. Again, on another occasion, when children were brought to Him, that He might bless them, and the disciples "rebuked" those that brought them, we read that "He took them in his arms, put his hands upon them, and blessed them."

Some words, with which many of us are familiar, and which are associated with both serious and hopeful thoughts, admonish us to lay stress upon the *attitude and manner* of our Lord on that occasion. It is not only, "Ye *hear* in this Gospel the words of our Saviour

Christ, that He commanded the children to be brought to Him, that He exhorteth all men to follow their innocency,"—but, "Ye perceive how by His outward *gesture and deed* He declared His good-will towards them, for He embraced them in His arms, put His hands on them, and blessed them." And surely it is a very expressive fact, too, in the Gospel history, and quite in harmony with those other occasions to which I have referred, that of the three persons whom He is recorded to have raised from the dead, one was a child.

And this touching characteristic of our Blessed Saviour may carry our thoughts to one special part of the subject which has been chosen for association with the raising of the ruler's daughter. There is no kind of hospital which it is more affecting to visit than a hospital for children, and no ward in a general hospital more full of pathetic interest than the children's ward. In hospital-management, indeed, a question has sometimes arisen, as to whether it is best to have a separate children's ward, or to distribute the children through the women's wards.



There is no need here to hazard an opinion on the medical side of this question. But on general grounds there is evidently much to be said in favour of the latter method. The presence of children tends to bring out those womanly and motherly feelings, the exercise of which is undoubtedly a benefit to the women themselves. The children are an amusement and a refreshment to those who are naturally tempted to be much pre-occupied with the thought of their own sorrow and suffering.

But, to turn to the general subject of children in a hospital, however placed, their mere presence there is a strong demand on our sympathy. Their pale faces, their little thin hands, the toys upon their bed, make us feel how sad and strange a place this earth is in which we live. Such patients have seen but little as yet of the bad ways of the world; but they have begun early in the school of suffering; and if we possess the mind of Christ, our feelings must be drawn towards them, with the desire to restore them to health and strength. Such reflections occur very

naturally after careful meditation on the raising of the daughter of Jairus.

(ii.) And now, another circumstance in which the considerate care of the Saviour in the working of this miracle is conspicuous, is the taking of the father and mother into the room where the child was lying. No others, except Peter, John, and James, were allowed to enter the chamber. We are expressly told that the people in general, who filled the house, and, indeed, who treated with ridicule any notion of a restoration to life, were “put out.” But the father and mother of the maiden were taken, with the three disciples, into the chamber of death. There is in this a recognition of parental rights, and a deep communion of the Saviour’s heart with domestic feeling, which seems to me very solemn and instructive.

And the Miracles of Christ set before us *this* side of His character in more instances than one. No doubt very severe things were said by Him in rebuke of those who put domestic love in the *first* place. We must “*hate* father and mother, and wife and children, and

brethren and sisters," or we cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven. But we know what this means. It is the *idolatry* of home-life, which, like every other idolatry, is fatal to the soul. Domestic love is honoured, respected, and most tenderly treated, by Jesus Christ. Something of this kind may be traced, as was remarked in the very first of these papers, in the miracle which had been worked shortly before, on the other side of the Lake of Gennesaret. The miserable demoniac had been healed and restored to his right mind, and when Jesus was about to enter the ship, prayed that he might be with Him: but Jesus answered, "Go home to thy friends, and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee, and hath had compassion on thee." But especially is this thought connected with the three recorded cases of restoring the dead to life. One of those who were thus restored was "the only son of his mother, and she was a widow;" one was the brother of Mary and Martha; and one was the only daughter of Jairus; and in each instance there is most

distinct proof of tender sympathy with domestic feeling.

Now, one of the great problems of modern society in this country is how to supply artificially some of the blessings of domestic life to those who, by circumstances, are deprived of it in its natural form. We speak much of our English homes; and we have great reason to be very thankful for the happiness which we enjoy in them. But we sometimes forget that there are many who have no homes. What is to be done for the deserted children of the poor, or the orphan daughters of many families that have seen prosperous days? And—even without bereavement and death—when the father is a dishonest vagrant, when the mother is a drunkard, where is home then?

But at present we are dealing with a somewhat different side of the subject. Even a well-ordered home among the poor is quite inadequate to cope with the consequences of a serious accident or with a prolonged illness. In the houses of the wealthy there are for such exigencies ample space, perfect

quiet, skilful nursing. Ought not those who have had experience of such comforts, or who will have experience of them, when their time of sickness comes,—ought they not to interpret God's goodness to them as a call for supplying these advantages, in the only possible way in which they can be supplied, to the poor? One great feature of a hospital is that it is *a substitute for home, at a time when all that we mean by home is most urgently needed*. All the noisy and disturbing crowd is shut out, as in the miracle at Capernaum, and it is as if the father and mother were brought gently in to the patient. Let us think of our English infirmaries in this kind of connection with domestic life. Let us think, too, how many of the patients—sailors from our ships—working men in search of employment—young women in failing health—are necessarily far away from their homes. Many of them have fathers and mothers somewhere, but not here. Let us take that father and that mother in our thoughts. So, in the sympathetic interest with which we regard

the restoration of health through these institutions, our feelings will be in conformity with the spirit of Jesus Christ.

(iii.) If we pursue the narrative further, the mind rests on a third particular, which is full of meaning, and supplies to us—though very lightly and gently—a lesson which we ought to learn. Jesus took the young maiden “*by the hand.*” All the three Evangelists who relate the miracle, take notice of this circumstance. And why is it mentioned at all, unless we are to learn something from it? As I have said before, the manner, the gesture, the aspect of Jesus Christ on these occasions is full of instruction and of admonition to ourselves. Nothing is trivial in the recorded actions of Jesus Christ. And surely this loving movement of His own sacred hand—this way of communicating the touch of life to the dead body—is very expressive of tenderness, thoughtfulness, and individual care.

Now, in our right appreciation of the subject before us, one essential point is the recollection that in that aggregate of suffering and

weakness, which a hospital contains, the case of each distinct sufferer requires individual attention. And this seems the right moment for noting this side of our subject. Much of the imagery of the Bible is connected with the hand, and for very obvious reasons. The hand is the instrument, and therefore the emblem, of active service, of gentle persuasion, of the exercise of power, of definite attention to one particular thing. And we cannot avoid seeing here some teaching of this kind in this recorded action of our Lord. In the case of two other miracles St. Mark makes mention of the same gesture. When Christ healed the blind man at Bethsaida, He took him "by the hand" and led him out of the town. When the demoniac child was in convulsions, just after the Transfiguration, "He took him by the hand and lifted him up."

And if I were to select one suggestion as conveyed to us by this part of the Saviour's manner, it would be the expression of personal feeling and of individual care. Each one of those whom He healed was separately

singled out and made the object of distinct sympathy. And hospital work, on however large a scale it may be, is not collective work, but has to do with a multitude of separate cases, each one distinct from all the rest. The large numbers who find relief for their sufferings in our hospitals, constitute one forcible argument for a high estimate of this fruit of Christianity. But this very circumstance may sometimes hide from us the point which is now before our thoughts. Each patient in that hospital has his separate suffering and his separate history. Our Saviour never forgot the individual in the crowd. Neither should we.

(iv.) There is still at least one other point of detail in this narrative to be pressed upon the reader's careful attention. When Christ had taken the maiden by the hand, and the words were spoken, and she arose and walked,—then, it is added, “He commanded that something should be given her to eat.” It appears to me that there is a calm depth of meaning, worthy of the greatness of Christ, in this one simple direction.



It not only tells us that He, who taught us to pray for "daily bread," knows all our wants, and sympathises with them all,—but it seems to exhibit our adorable Saviour in compassionate contact with the slow stages of recovery from sickness, and thus, let it be added, in contact with some of the most important parts of the exercise of medical art. Nowhere is the true connection of Christianity with Science so evident, as when scientific knowledge is applied to healing disease, relieving pain, and restoring to health and strength. And it is the hospital, above all other things, which sets before us this characteristic contact of Christianity with Science. Now in the restoring of an invalid, there is to be considered not the mere throwing off of the disease, but likewise all that we understand by the term *convalescence*.

It would certainly be out of place here to enter into any technical matters, especially when the writer does not understand them. But we all know something of the special importance and the special difficulties of the period of convalescence. And we are very

safe in referring to what has been written on this subject by that English lady, whose name always recurs to the mind when we speak of hospitals. Florence Nightingale reminds us that restoration to life is one thing, restoration to health and usefulness is another—that complete recovery depends on after-nursing as well as on medical skill—on sufficient air and space—on diet administered in proper quantities and at proper times—that convalescence, like disease, has its degrees and its course—that, if it is long protracted, it often ends, among the poor, in relapse and death—and that many patients are forced to leave our infirmaries prematurely, to make way for more necessitous cases. Such considerations as these cover a very wide range of human need and human suffering: and the mind is naturally led to travel over the whole of this range, when we contemplate our hospitals in the light thrown upon them by Christ our Saviour. Even the incidental circumstances of His merciful works on earth,—small in themselves as those circumstances may be, such as the

direction to give food to the child, whose life was beginning again,—are great in their suggestiveness and instruction to us.

In a series of Meditations on the Miracles of Christ, though for the most part they have been so treated as to elucidate some spiritual truth that has reference to the maladies of the soul, it seemed natural that at least one of them should be made an example to ourselves, so as to kindle our sympathy, and enforce our duty, in regard to the maladies of the body; and no way of doing this seemed more effectual than to connect our thoughts with those hospitals, in which Christ, even now, seems present to heal. The very simplicity too of what was said and done in the house of Jairus makes the lesson all the more suitable to our purpose. And, to conclude, how infinitely does the greatness of the lesson grow upon us, when we think who He was, who has been the subject of our contemplation in this one of His works at Capernaum—no mere reformer of corrupt morals—no mere teacher of the ignorant mind—but the Restorer of spiritual life—one who could

probe the deep wounds of sin, and heal them too—who can take away that sense of guilt which separates us from God and make us children again of an offended Father! So great, that He was able to undertake the task of reconciling the world with God, and Himself bore all the burden, yet He found time to pay attention to instance after instance of bodily suffering, showed the most considerate care of family sorrow, and had kind actions always ready even for the children.

XII.

THE FRAGMENTS THAT REMAIN.

“Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost.”

JOHN vi. 12.

## XII.

### THE FRAGMENTS THAT REMAIN.



SELDOM, if ever, did our Lord work a miracle without teaching a lesson at the same time.

Thus when a man was brought to Him, helpless with paralysis, and carried by other men, He said first, "Thy sins be forgiven thee,"—herein reminding us of the terrible paralysis which is the result of sin, and of the consoling truth, that He is able entirely to heal it. Thus again, when a victim of that fearful demoniac possession was brought to the disciples, before He healed the boy, He said to them, "This kind goeth not out"—this kind of malady—this kind of evil spirit—cannot be cast out, "except by prayer and fasting:" herein admonishing us that there

are some sins so powerful, so inveterate, that we cannot get rid of them except by a very special exercise of prayer, accompanied by strong self-discipline.

And sometimes the lessons taught by our Saviour on those occasions were different from what we should expect to find associated with the miracles that were worked. Thus when the deaf and dumb boy was brought to Him, He did not immediately pronounce the word "Ephphatha"—"be opened"—nor did He discourse, as we might well have expected, on the hearing of the ear in the spiritual sense, or on the employment of the voice for God's glory and man's good; but we are carefully told by the Evangelist that Jesus took the patient aside from the multitude, and then worked the cure. Why was this? We cannot suppose that this retirement from the crowd was for any mere convenience to the Saviour in the exercise of His power. Nor is it easy to imagine that it was for the purpose of attracting greater attention to the miracle. For this motive would have been applicable to any of the miracles. No. We can hardly doubt that this significant act was



intended to impress upon us a truth which we are very apt to forget in this bustling world ; namely the benefit, and indeed the necessity, for the soul's good, of seasons of retirement. Sometimes God, in the course of His providence, takes *us* aside from the multitude, as when He lays us on the bed of sickness, and *forces* us to have opportunity for thinking seriously and for repenting. And at times we ought ourselves voluntarily to so secure such opportunities for quiet and solitary thought, as, let us say for instance, when we are just preparing to pass from one year to another. Some people choose the end of the year for light amusement, and take pains, just then, to forget the serious and true aspect of this short and responsible life. But it is, to say the least, very foolish so to throw aside the help which the solemnity of the time naturally affords for the benefit of the soul.

The miracle of the feeding of the five thousand, which is one of the subjects of the sixth chapter of St. John, is marked by both the characteristics I have mentioned. It is accompanied by the teaching of a lesson : and

the lesson which is taught, is not quite what we should expect.

Something indeed of this is true of the opening part of the transaction, as well as of the close. We find the Saviour, when the multitude was before Him, asking one of the disciples—"Whence shall we buy bread that these may eat?" This was not really for the sake of instituting an inquiry as to whether an adequate supply of food could be obtained. In fact the Evangelist adds—"This he said to prove him: for he himself knew what he would do." In another account of this miraculous feeding of a multitude, the question is put more simply—"How many loaves have ye?" The purpose of this seems to have been to call attention to that which existed, as the supply which was to be used in the first place. This was, so to speak, the visible starting-point of the miracle. And the lesson appears to be this:—Use well and wisely what you have, and in using it expect more—make the most of present opportunities, and then God will develop them and give you greater opportunities. "To him that hath shall be given: and he shall have

abundantly." On all this rich meaning of that pointed inquiry at the beginning of the miracle we might dwell with advantage. But it is the lesson at the close with which we are now concerned.

*"Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost."* This was said by Jesus after the multitude was fed. And the lesson is clearly this: that nothing which God gives is to be lightly regarded—that even after great opportunities have been afforded, the small opportunities are not to be neglected—that a gracious purpose penetrates even into the lesser details of life—that every relic of God's mercy is to be cherished—that nothing is too small for Him to bless.

This is certainly an unexpected turn to give to the teaching of this miracle. It is not a little remarkable that, after so lavish an expenditure of power, so great care should be taken of the small fragments that were left. There is to my mind an extraordinary dignity and solemnity in this saying of Christ. He speaks here as the Master of creation. He says—I can create as lavishly as I will: but you are not to waste. Whether I give you

much or little, it must be all used. And because I have given you the greater, you must not despise the smaller. Not one single fragment of my blessings is either to be abused or neglected.

And now in bringing this most expressive word and this most significant act into some connection with our own lives,—it is evidently right in the first place to accept them very literally. This occurrence in the Gospel-history is an admonition against waste—waste in that ordinary sense of the word, which is very familiar in every household. The Gospel abounds everywhere with lessons of generosity; but here at least there is one lesson of economy. And let me say, in passing, that the one is not contrary to the other. Economy is a great help to generosity. St. Paul tells us that we ought to work in order that we may give. It is quite according to the spirit of that precept, if we *save* in order that we may give.

But to turn our thoughts more closely to this question of *waste*, perhaps it may be most useful, if we select one of the commonest cases of this fault. In a course of expository

and practical writing on any section of God's Word, first one class of the community and then another comes before the view. The old and the young, the rich and the poor, the educated and the ignorant, those who employ the services of others, and those who agree on fixed terms to give their services—each has a right to its own encouragements from the Bible, each ought to be summoned in turn to listen to its own admonitions from the same source. Now it is probable that many domestic servants may read these pages, and a large number of those who, in various positions, labour for others and who are paid for their labour; and this mention of waste suggests the addressing of a few words to that large and important body of the community.

We see in this passage that our Saviour admonishes us—in a very serious manner—on a very remarkable occasion—that *waste is wrong*, that we ought to make the most of every one of God's good gifts. Now, if all waste is wrong, what are we to say of wasting that which belongs to another person? Which is the worse, to waste that which is given to us directly by God for our own use,—or to

waste that, for the use of which we are responsible to some one else? It is not difficult to give the right answer to that question. But practically the wrong answer is often given to it. Or rather the question is too often not asked at all: and therefore it is asked here. These points of common practical duty can easily be brought to some simple and decisive tests, if only we will reflect upon them. Thus many a servant, who would not for the world take dishonestly a single penny in money, will take and apply in some wrong way what is worth a great many pence. Or, to save herself trouble, when she is not observed, she will lose in mere waste what she would certainly economise in some useful manner, if the eye of her mistress was upon her. Or again, suppose such a servant to become in due time the wife of a labouring man, when every fragment of God's providential bounty will evidently be of great consequence, she will then perhaps practise a forethought and care which she does not practise now. But our Saviour gives this rule to all of us for all times: "Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing

be lost." And St. Paul writing to the Ephesians, says to servants, that they are to act "not with eye-service, as men-pleasers, but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart; with good will doing service, as to the Lord and not to men."

And there is often waste in another form, with regard to which conscience is even more liable to be asleep. I mean *the waste of time*—time, which (I would say to a servant or a clerk, or the like) is not yours but your master's or your employer's. Short of open and shameful misconduct, there is no habit more productive of discomfort in a household or in business, more destructive of really good satisfactory work, than this habit of wasting fragments of time. I said this time was not yours, but your master's or your employer's. And this is evidently the case. If you are continually loitering and trifling, you cannot do properly the work which you promised to do. In wasting time, you are wasting the very thing for which you were engaged. You know how diligently you would begin to work, if your master or your employer were suddenly to appear. Try to correct this bad habit.

And will you say that this is a small thing to write about, in connection with one of the Divine miracles? Christ does not make this distinction between small things and great things. He *changes* small things into great things by infusing into these small things the high dignity of religious principle. Christ is continually saying to you—while you are losing these portions of time and trampling them under foot—"Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost:"—and it is surely to such as you, that St. Paul addresses himself, in his Epistle to the Colossians: "Obey those who are over you, according to the flesh, not with eye-service as men-pleasers: but in singleness of heart, fearing God: and whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men."

But, in touching this question of *time*, we have already come into view of a wider and more general range of our subject. We have all been guilty, in some way or other—most of us in many ways—of the *waste of time*:—and how the rapid progress of time admonishes us that the fragments that remain are fewer and fewer,—and gives a most solemn



emphasis to those words of Christ, first addressed to the twelve on that hill-side near the Sea of Galilee, and since addressed to generation after generation, till they are now before our eyes and our thoughts at this moment: "Gather up" these fragments of time, "that nothing be lost." Not one moment of this time can be lost—that is, sinfully or neglectfully spent—without harm resulting. Not indeed that we are always to be doing something. Rest, relaxation, and sleep are not modes of wasting time; but, in their due proportion, most proper and necessary ways of spending time. But the habit of carelessness in regard to time,—the want of watchfulness in gathering up its fragments,—this is a serious evil, in regard to which it is often very difficult to awaken the conscience. And its seriousness depends on this, that these fragments are becoming fewer and fewer, and can never be replenished. As each successive year approaches its close, it is still desirable to press the same point as strongly as ever. And what new illustration can be thought of to force its importance on the attention of the reluctant? May we not say this—that a man

who wastes *other things* is like a man who spends his *income* foolishly, while the capital remains; for there is still an unexhausted supply behind, and there is in such a case a possibility of retrieving the errors of the past:—but that when a man wastes *time*, he is like a spendthrift living on *capital*?—he must become continually poorer and poorer—till at length absolutely *nothing* is left. When death comes, then the last of these fragments is gone.

But further, not only are these fragments of time precious, because they are in their nature perishable, and must be gathered at the moment when they are present, or not gathered at all,—but they are precious, because each one contains in itself *unknown opportunities of good*. In any given moment of time no one can say how much benefit may be received to the soul, or how much benefit conferred upon other souls: and if the time is lost, these opportunities are lost. And it need not be added that the only method of saving these moments from loss is by watchfulness, thoughtfulness, and by cherishing a sense of responsibility. Such habits of mind

are the hands, by which these "fragments" are "gathered up."

And yet there is a reluctance to speak of these moments of the time that is past, as if they were altogether gone. Those moments of time, those opportunities, though literally gone, still, however great our carelessness may have been, can hardly have passed away without something being left behind, on which we may yet lay hold. Surely, in one sense, some "*fragments*" remain: and we may gather them still, that *all* be not lost. Are there not relics of grace, so to speak, stored up in our memories? When we look back on the road by which we have travelled, and retrace the spiritual history of the past, we must observe events which well deserve to be recalled, and which can easily be recalled—providences which touched us very closely—warnings that were felt to be very serious at the time—sermons which sent us home with consciences uneasy—mercies which we were far from deserving—resolutions made and broken—and indeed many, many tokens, both of God's goodness and of our infirmity. Though these things are past, the recollec-

tion of them can be refreshed, and thus some of their benefit can still be secured. These surviving memories are surviving "fragments" of good. They are portions of the bread which feeds our souls: and they may still be "gathered up," so that *all* be not "lost." And if we do so gather them up, with the eye of Christ upon us, with Christ standing by, as He stood by the disciples at the lake,—with Christ to bless us, as He blessed them,—our case is very far from hopeless, little as we deserve His infinite mercy.

But to some of us there must surely be something more than such relics of grace in the lower sense. I trust that there is with many of us some effect which we can trace as the result of God's merciful dealing with us—some increased watchfulness in prayer, some abiding sorrow for sin, some conscious gratitude for our Heavenly Father's goodness, some quicker tenderness of conscience, the correcting of some untoward temper, the weakening, if not altogether the subduing, of some evil habit, some duty more willingly rendered to God or man, some richer taste of the sweetness of Divine promises. We need

not be afraid to observe these things in ourselves, and to dwell upon them. It will not make us proud. They do not amount to much, after all. But Christ bids us make much of them ; for they all come from Him. Such baskets of fragments, with His gracious approbation resting upon them, are a great encouragement. They remind us that the supply of heavenly food to our souls is a reality, and they tell us that we need have no fears for the future.

This takes our thoughts into another channel. We should not fail to observe that these words of Christ were originally addressed to those who had richly partaken of the banquet, and had helped others to partake : “ Jesus took the loaves, and when he had given thanks he distributed to the disciples, and the disciples to them that were set down ; and likewise of the fishes as much as they would. And *when they were filled*, he said unto his disciples, Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost.” Even if we have attended and enjoyed Christ’s spiritual banquet through the year—even if we have been very punctual in public worship, very careful

in private prayer, truly devout at the Holy Communion, very diligent in reading Scripture, very active in works of benevolence and kindness—still nothing is to be disregarded. The smaller mercies, scattered here and there through the year, should be reverently gathered up, and stored in the memory. They are all fragments of spiritual food, too precious to be lost. Nothing is forgotten by God: therefore nothing should be willingly forgotten by us. Nothing is so small but that God can fill it with an abundant blessing: therefore nothing should be regarded as trivial or indifferent by us, if in any way it can be made useful for the nutriment and strengthening of our souls.

But though primarily addressed, in tones of encouragement, to those who have sat at the feast and enjoyed its blessings, the saying which followed the miracle addresses itself in admonition, with a sad solemnity, to those who have passed the banquet by—who have spent a life without prayer, whose Bible is closed on the shelf, who have turned their back upon God's most sacred ordinance, whose whole course of existence has simply had reference to self—so that *nothing but*

*fragments* are left, nothing but a very short remainder of time, a very scanty supply of opportunities, a difficult gathering up of old impressions and hopes and fears, which now have become very dull and very dim. It is indeed most melancholy to think of a life which has wasted all its vigour and freshness, till only the dregs remain—of the flame burning feebly and faintly, and only burning at all because some few poor drops of oil survive. But still in such a case, though grace has been trifled with, it is not quite extinct; and even in the worst of such cases there are these two grounds for penitent hope: first, that it is our Saviour's voice that gives this precept, "Gather up the fragments," and secondly that His creative power is ever present to multiply and to bless. He desires that no soul should be lost; and He can turn even such broken supplies as these into the food of an immortal soul and the preparation for an eternal life.

So then, whatever our character or state of mind may be, there is something for us all in this action and saying of Christ's—something to lay seriously and closely to heart. The

sentence is very short ; but it was made emphatic by the action which followed it ; and whatever Christ said or did is of inestimable value. As regards any words of ours, it is much if any fragment of them is worth remembering ; and as to our deeds, it is more than we deserve, if, joined to the deeds of other men, they help in any way the progress of God's kingdom. But even the "fragments" of what is recorded concerning Christ are more precious than gold. And indeed let it be remembered that we have *only fragments* of that mysterious biography. Let us not lose any single one, however small it may seem to be ; and so let us end with what St. John says near the close of his Gospel : " There were also many other things which Jesus did : many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book ; but *these* are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that, believing, ye might have life through his name."



XIII.


MIRACLES WORKED THROUGH THE  
APOSTLES.

**“His name, through faith in His name.”**

ACTS iii. 16.

### XIII.

#### MIRACLES WORKED THROUGH THE APOSTLES.

 HERE is no part of the Sacred Volume on which it is more desirable to fix a careful and exact attention than the point of transition from the Gospel-history to the Acts of the Apostles; and St. Luke has put a mark of a very peculiar kind on this precise part of his writing.

He begins the Apostolic annals by saying : “ The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus *began* both to do and to teach, until the day in which he was taken up. ” It is important here to lay stress on this word “ *began* ; ” because the main emphasis of the whole passage resides in this word,—or, to put the matter less strongly, because here is the true pivot of the connection

between the history contained in the Acts of the Apostles and the history contained in the Gospel of St. Luke. And taking this as our point of departure, we may follow a train of thought, which will be found to fall strictly under the description of *Meditations on the Miracles of Christ*.

And, first, it is well worth our while to consider this Gospel of St. Luke and these Acts of the Apostles in the mere fact of their having *the same authorship*. As to the fact itself, that these two books of Holy Scripture were written by the same pen, or dictated by the same voice, this may be made very clear at a glance. It is true that the name of St. Luke is not mentioned in the title of the Acts. But the two treatises are dedicated to the same person : the second treatise refers to a former treatise as containing the Acts of Christ ; and the former treatise does contain those Acts. It would be easy to add confirmations from style, and manner, and contents, if it were not desirable to condense these preliminary remarks into a small compass. As to any doubts which have been thrown on the authorship of the Acts of the

Apostles, they are the results, so far as I am able to judge, of very weak or captious criticism. We have then here, in St. Luke's Gospel and in the book of Acts, two volumes of the same work, inscribed to the same person, written by the same author, and treating of different parts of the same subject. This same St. Luke, who was St. Paul's companion in sickness—helped him in his missionary work—travelled with him over mountains and plains—was with him in storms at sea—was shipwrecked with him on the coast of Malta—entered with him through the suburbs and into the city of Rome—this same St. Luke is the biographer of Christ, relates the parables of Christ, describes the miracles of Christ. This binding together of the two books by a common authorship is a fact well worthy of careful consideration; and, not to pursue this topic further, it is a good illustration of the important principle that Scripture ought to be studied, not merely in isolated portions, but in the connection, the natural connection, of its parts.

Next let us dwell on this, that though the contents of the two books are extremely

different, yet they do really relate to *the same subject*. The one ends with the Ascension of Christ, and the command that the disciples should “tarry in Jerusalem” for the “promise of his Father;” the other begins with the Ascension and the fulfilment of that “promise of the Father.” These two volumes of the same work, as I have called them—the two volumes being of about equal length—are, the one ended, the other begun—we will not say with artistic skill—for nothing can be more remote from the characteristics of the Bible than mere art and ingenuity—but in such a way as to impress upon us the truth that one is devoted to the teaching and working of Christ during His earthly life, the other to the teaching and working of Christ, where He now is, in Heaven.

Here is the point which led to the remark made at the outset on the word “began” in the first verse of the Acts. Christ *still works, still teaches*. But then He worked and taught personally on earth; now He works and teaches—not within the narrow limits of one little country—not in the few years of an earthly ministry—but in the power of that

heavenly life to which He is withdrawn, and through the Holy Ghost operating everywhere on the hearts of men. The Ascension, which is the last act of His earthly ministry, is the beginning of His heavenly kingdom. "Being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost," He inspired, and guided, and strengthened the Apostles. Thus this book of *their* Acts has sometimes been called "the Gospel of the Holy Ghost ;" and in no way do we see the significance and fitness of this title so well, as by viewing these two treatises of St. Luke in their connection.

Now, therefore, in observing the relation between these two treatises, we have had our attention called to both "*doing*" and "*teaching*" on the part of Christ. Let us devote a short space to each of these two particulars, considering each under two heads.

Jesus continued to *do* what He *did* before. And first, He worked Miracles. This He *began* to do during His earthly life in Judæa and Galilee. This He *continued* to do, after His Ascension, through the power of the Holy Ghost, communicated to the Apostles

In fact even during His earthly life the power of the Holy Ghost is prominently mentioned in connection with the miracles. St. Peter tells Cornelius "how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil: for God was with him." And similarly the Apostles worked miracles. It was also by the power of the Holy Ghost that they were enabled to work them. But it was in the name of Christ, and as the representatives of Christ, that they did this. The *doer* of all these wonders was Christ. They were His miracles, not theirs. St. Peter's first sermon, addressed to the Jews at Pentecost, sums up the whole case: "Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know—he hath shed forth this which you do see and hear." And similar is the purport of words used by St. Paul, after long-continued work among the Gentiles. Writing to the Galatians, and appealing to their experience, he says, "He that ministereth to



you the Spirit, and worketh miracles among you, doeth he it by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?" It is still the working of Christ on the one hand, and the eliciting of faith in Christ on the other, which are the characteristics of the later as well as the earlier miracles. This is our main subject, to which, as illustrated in one very marked example, we shall presently turn. Here attention is drawn simply to the fact that even in this respect Christ, after His Ascension, *continued to "do" as He began.*

But it is not by miracles only, in the restricted sense of the word, but in the far more important wonders, of which those others were only types and shadows—in subduing the power of sin—in reconciling men to their Father—in giving peace to the conscience—in bringing Christians together in offices of love—it is thus that Christ continued, as He had begun, to work, and still continues. This is the true meaning of the history which we follow all through the Acts, and which is illustrated by the Epistles. And this—not the disputes of human passion, or the display

of human vanity, on the surface—but this deep spiritual progress within is the true Church History of modern times. This inward change in the heart and character cannot be man's doing. “It is *the Lord's doing*, and it is marvellous in our eyes.” It is the “new creation in Christ Jesus,” Himself exercising the creative power which inherently belongs to Him. And this is our strength, our consolation, our motive for working ourselves. By weak human words, such as those which are written on this page—by humble and loving deeds, such as those which any reader of these pages can practise—through His ministers—and through those who are not in any official sense His ministers—so Christ “worketh hitherto” even as He “began.”

Not only, however, is the “doing” of Christ, but “the *teaching*” of Christ, brought before us in the sentence which opens the annals of the Apostles. And here it is well to bear in mind that if Christ had remained on earth, and not ascended to heaven, we should not have possessed the New Testament. But, being in heaven, He has poured out the Holy Ghost on those who were

appointed to *record* His teaching. Thus in St. Luke's Gospel and in the other Gospels we have His "teaching" continued with us, even as it "began." Still we hear Him, as when, in the synagogue at Nazareth, "He opened the book, and found the place where it was written: The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the Gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind;" and still, like the people of Nazareth, we "wonder at the gracious words which proceed out of his mouth."

But more than this: Jesus continued to "teach" through *the teaching of the Apostles*: and He continues still to "teach" in every heart that is truly enlightened by the Holy Ghost. "He that descended is the same that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things; and he gave some Apostles; and some Prophets; and some, Evangelists; and some, Pastors and Teachers: for the perfecting of the Saints, for the work of the Ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ." To the possession of what

is described in this passage we may still lay claim, due allowance being made for the differences between our own times and the first miraculous outburst of the Church. Christ, though absent, is still present with plenary power. As it has been truly said, "a new accession to glory came to Him in the mission of the Comforter:" and His teaching still penetrates as heretofore into the consciences of men, and is ever spreading over a wider and wider range.

But now, both the *doing* and *teaching* of Christ are shown in His *Miracles*. This truth has been illustrated already in a large number of instances taken from the Gospel-history: and the same method may be pursued in what has been spoken of above as the second volume of the Acts of Christ. There is, moreover, in the early part of this second treatise, one miracle recorded so minutely, with all its attendant circumstances, that it is manifestly intended to be studied with great care. In this respect the account of the healing of the lame man at the Temple Gate takes rank with the conversion of Cornelius, and almost with the conversion of St. Paul himself.

Peter and John, in going to the Temple at the hour of prayer, were solicited for alms by a man who had been "lame from his birth," and who was daily placed, for the purpose of seeking relief, "at the gate which is called Beautiful." It may be well to give St. Luke's account of the miracle verbally; inasmuch as reference will be made, before we close, to some points of detail. "Peter, fastening his eyes on him with John, said, Look on us. And he gave heed unto them, expecting to receive something of them. Then Peter said, Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk. And he, took him by the hand and lifted him up; and immediately his feet and ankle-bones received strength. And he, leaping up, stood, and walked, and entered with them into the Temple, walking and leaping and praising God." The consequences of this Miracle were very great, and they are recounted carefully and copiously. What we have to deal with is the manner in which Peter himself spoke of the occurrence.

We have first to observe that the words used by St. Peter at the time were : “ *In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk ;*” and we find this same phrase running through the whole subsequent account, which may be divided into three stages. Without delay, the people, in great astonishment, gather round the two Apostles “ in the porch that is called Solomon’s.” Here Peter exclaims, “ Why look ye so earnestly on us, as though by our own power we had made this man to walk ?” He disclaims all the honour of the wonder. He insists that he and his brother Apostle in the working of it have been simply instruments in the hand of Christ. “ The God of their fathers had glorified his Son Jesus—had raised him from the dead—*His name, through faith in his name*, had made the lame man strong.” “ Yea,” he continues, “ the faith which is by him hath given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all.” The next step in the transaction is the bringing of the two Apostles before the high priest and the rulers, to arraign them for what had been done. The question asked is, “ By what power, or by what name, have ye

done this?" And the answer is, "Be it known unto you all, that by *the name of Jesus Christ* of Nazareth, whom God raised from the dead, *even by him*, doth this man stand here before you whole. Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is *none other name* under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved." And now, to pass to the third stage of this history, when orders have been given—orders which it was impossible to obey—that they were no longer "to speak at all nor teach *in the name of Jesus*;" and when they have returned "to their own company," then, in the psalm of prayer and thanksgiving, which closes the history of this miracle, these earliest Christians "lift up their voice" and ask that God would "stretch forth his hand to heal, and that signs and wonders may be done *by the name of his holy servant Jesus*."

On a review of this whole transaction, two topics come forth into prominence, the "*name*" of Jesus, and "*faith*" in that name. A few words on each of these topics, with a reference to some of the characteristic details of the occurrence, may bring these remarks to a close.

This phrase, “the *name* of Jesus Christ,” is to be viewed in the first place as distinguishing Him and separating Him absolutely from all other persons or things in heaven or earth. And, even thus, the phraseology used in reference to this miracle has much force and meaning. For it transfers the responsibility, the power, the honour, of the event entirely to Him. But when we consider further that *the name* of the Saviour was in itself significant, we perceive that the language involves something more. Our thoughts travel back inevitably from this early part of the Apostolical history to the early part of the Evangelical history, where it is said, “Thou shalt call *his name* Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sins.” And, to turn to another side of the subject, we must bear in mind that “the name of Christ,” in Scriptural language, denotes Christ himself as revealed and made known to us. As, in any ordinary case, it is customary to make the name of an object stand for the object itself, so in Scripture the word “name” is solemnly used of the Divine Being, not as a mere appellation, but as expressive of what



He is, so far as we are able to apprehend Him. A multitude of instances of this usage could be given in regard to Jehovah in the old Testament, and Christ in the New. And yet, further, there is one thing more to be remarked concerning the phrase as employed here. In the Gospels we see Christ working and teaching personally, visibly, directly. In the Acts, He is no longer manifest to the outward eye: but the reality of His power is still the same. He continues to work even as He "began," though now this is done through the agency of others; and language is used in harmony with the change in His mode of operation. For our own comfort, too, we must recollect that all those attributes of mercy, sympathy, knowledge and power, which are summed up in His "name," have their blessing for us still, as much as for those who lived in the Apostolic age.

If now we pass from the term which sums up for us all the attributes of Christ, to the principle by which those attributes are apprehended for practical results, we again find a wide field open for instructive thought, in connection with what we read of this miracle.

There is great emphasis in the double reference to *faith*, which St. Peter makes in addressing the multitude who crowded round him in Solomon's porch. Not only does he say that Christ's name, "*through faith in that name*," had made the lame man whole: but he adds, "Yea, the *faith* which is by him hath given him this perfect soundness:" and we can hardly avoid the conclusion that this language points to the exercise of that principle on the part not only of the Apostles, but of the lame man himself. *Faith in Christ* was the condition on which they worked miracles; and we cannot think that the blessing would have come in this way to the lame man, unless he too had had "faith to be healed."

Here we may look with advantage at some of the circumstances of the miracle, which exhibit very forcibly the action of faith. We should notice the definite fixed attention which Peter gave to the lame man, and the definite fixed attention which the lame man gave to Peter. When we enter within the range of spiritual interpretation, we must never forget that *separate singling out* of the individual, which is so marked a character-

istic of the miracles directly worked by Christ Himself. The same is true here: and one application of the fact, which it seems natural to make in this instance, regards the relation subsisting between Ministers of the Gospel and those among whom they minister. The exercise of close attention on each side is a matter of vital consequence; and religious benefit may be expected to be proportional to the study of individual character, and to sympathy felt for separate sorrows and temptations.

A similar thought may be connected with the *simultaneous* exercise of active faith on the part of the Apostles and the lame man. Strong in the conviction of His Master's power, St. Peter stretched forth his hand: and the lame man responded at the moment with the grasp of his own hand; and instantaneously his frame was invigorated, and his life-long infirmity was gone. "The name of Jesus Christ," apprehended on each side by faith, was that which produced this wondrous result; and this occurrence may justly be viewed as a type of effective spiritual ministrations, the whole power of which re-

sides in Christ. As to our giving a spiritual turn at all to the transaction, St. Peter himself authorises us to do so by his own employment of this healing of the body to lead up the thoughts of his hearers to the "salvation" of the soul. So true is it that the Miracles of Christ after His Ascension convey the same kind of instruction, and according to the same methods, as those with which He "began," while yet on earth.

And, to complete this train of thought, one thing at least yet remains to be said. St. Luke, in his medical manner, describes the invigoration of the lame man, specifying the symptoms, and naming the parts of the body which had been destitute of power. "His feet and ankle-bones received strength." And then follows the account of his joyous thankful use of his limbs, and his warm clinging to his benefactors. Ought we not to see in this the proper result of a true conversion? Cheerful and active obedience is the best indication of our having, through Christ, been made spiritually free. "I will run the way of thy commandments," says the Psalmist, "when thou hast set my heart at liberty."

XIV.

MIRACLES WORKED THROUGH  
ST. PAUL.

“He that ministereth to you the Spirit, and  
worketh miracles among you, doeth He it by the  
works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?”

GAL. iii. 5.

## XIV.

### MIRACLES WORKED THROUGH ST. PAUL.



LARGE amount of the conclusive evidence for the truth of Christianity resides in the relation which subsisted between St. Paul and Christ. The life of Christ indeed carries in itself the proof of something Divine, and the life of St. Paul, too, carries in itself the proof of something which rises very strangely above any ordinary human experience. But when the two lives are taken in combination together, the force of the testimony is increased a hundred-fold. Such a life as that of Christ, if it stood alone without anything to follow it, would be inexplicable; but followed, as it is, by the life of St. Paul,—or, in other words, followed by Christianity,—it constrains us to

bow down before its evidence. So too the life of St. Paul, if we had no record of any precedent facts to explain it, would be unaccountable; but in the life of Christ we have its complete explanation. Each of the two biographies supplies an enormous corroboration of the trustworthiness of the other; and the two together form a weight of evidence, which may well be called irresistible.

The relation of the two biographies may easily be summed up in one word. The life of St. Paul stands to the life of Christ in a position of absolute *dependence*. Everything which St. Paul says or does is referred to Christ. The motive for its performance, the ability from which it originates, the success to which it leads, are all viewed as appertaining not to the Apostle himself, but to Christ. If what we read concerning Christ is true, then all this is explained. If the Gospel-history is a fable, then St. Paul is the most perplexing person in history. We could understand a fanaticism arising out of mere hallucination: but St. Paul is singularly wise, and discreet, and prudent. We could also understand a



man, by persevering and methodical labour, making converts in his own cause. But St. Paul does nothing in his own cause. He makes converts, but, so to speak, he hands them over immediately to Christ. He continually increases the range of his influence ; but the very power by which he achieves this is said by him to come entirely from Christ. He has no desire to make himself a name. He is willing to suffer anything, if only his Master may be honoured thereby ; and when he boasts, he boasts "in the Lord." The language which he uses is all to this effect. To him "to live is Christ." He "can do all things through Christ strengthening him." He is "complete in him." If all this is considered closely and steadily, the truth of what was said above concerning the strength of evidence, which results from the *combination* of the two biographies, will be admitted. If we view St. Paul as a sincere, intelligent and sane man, his career proves that Jesus Christ lived and died, and rose again, according to the Gospel record. But much more than this : it follows that, while St. Paul was the human instrument of Christ,

Christ Himself is Divine, still exercising in heaven the power which belonged to Him on earth. So that these two biographies, taken together, not only mutually confirm the truth of one another, but show to us the Divine pre-eminence of the one and the absolute dependence of the other,—and, in fact, confirm to us not merely the truth of Christianity, as a revealed religion, but its essential characteristic as a religion in which Christ is supreme.

We are now following the same train of thought which we began before in reference to St. Peter and the Apostles who were immediately associated with him. What was true of those Apostles, was true of St. Paul and of the wider sphere in which he operated. The miracles worked by him were the miracles of Christ.

If we pursue the Apostolic history from the point where we left it, we can still trace the same principle throughout. It cannot indeed be said that “the *name* of Jesus Christ” is made so prominent in the accounts of the working of all St. Peter’s miracles, as we found to be the case in that instance

which was intended to be typical and representative of the whole. But in the healing of the lame man at the Temple Gate we read the general principle which governs the whole series of these miracles. Nor, on the other hand, is the Divine power of Christ by any means the subject of *scanty* reference in those instances with which St. Peter was directly concerned. Thus, in the mission to Samaria, it was in connection with "the preaching" of Christ that "miracles and signs were done," and that the Samaritans received the marvellous powers of the Holy Ghost. So, in the restoration of Æneas to health at Lydda, the word of the Apostle was, "Æneas, Jesus Christ maketh thee whole: arise and make thy bed;" and, finally, in the great instance of Cornelius, it was immediately after the proclamation that "through Christ's name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins," that the miraculous powers of the Holy Ghost were manifested, and "the like gift" was given to the Gentiles as unto the Jews who at the first had "believed on the Lord Jesus Christ."

So, to leave the history of St. Peter, and

to pass on towards the copious record which we possess of St. Paul, we see that it was in the consciousness of the strength of Him who “sat at the right hand of God,” that Stephen did “great wonders and miracles among the people:” while in the conversion of St. Paul himself it is most conspicuously “Jesus” who works this grand and crowning miracle from heaven, and thus asserts the perpetuity of that power with which He wrought His wonders upon earth.

Now with regard to miracles worked by the Apostle of the Gentiles, the same thing is palpably true of them, as of the miracles worked by St. Peter. It is *Christ working through him* as truly as when Christ in visible presence calmed the storm on the Sea of Tiberias, or raised the dead at the gate of Nain. And it is equally a fact, that the great principle elicited in the course of this miraculous agency—and the principle on which the reception of its full spiritual blessing depended—was *Faith*. Still the Lord Jesus Christ virtually said to those on whom, through the instrumentality of His Apostle, His power was exercised, “Thy faith hath

saved thee : go in peace.” It must be admitted indeed, as in the history also of St. Peter, that we are not told of the actual mention of the *name* of Jesus in the account of every miracle. But this is to be remarked, that many of St. Paul’s miracles were worked in Heathen countries, where the Saviour’s name was absolutely unknown, not in the presence of Jews in their own country, where the preaching and works of Jesus were a familiar subject. Thus they might be intended rather to call attention to what was about to be proclaimed than to attest a truth which had already been appealing to the conscience. Yet even at Lystra, where the people were clearly in a rude and uneducated state, that healing of the lame man, which may justly be adduced as a parallel to the scene at the “ Beautiful ” gate of the Temple at Jerusalem, was prefaced by the remark that “ Paul, stedfastly beholding him, perceived that he had *faith* to be healed.” At Philippi, the word addressed to the spirit possessing the demoniac woman is, most explicitly, “ I command thee *in the name of Jesus Christ* to come out of her.” So at Ephesus

it is clear that the evil spirits recognised “*Jesus*” in the “special miracles wrought by the hands of Paul;” while, to return to Philippi, we have, in the question of the jailer and in the answer, the very same blending of the marvel of spiritual conversion with the marvel invading the ordinary course of Nature, which is constantly brought before us in the Gospels: “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?—*Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved and thy house.*”

There has been in some quarters a disposition to urge that St. Paul lays very little stress himself on miracles, as an instrument of the progress of the Gospel under his hands, and so to throw a shade of suspicion upon the recorded instances in the Book of Acts. Now in reply to such remarks it may be observed, in the first place, that in the latter part of St. Luke’s narrative itself miracles are less conspicuous, relatively to other things, than in the earlier part, which relates to St. Peter. And may we not recognise a fitness, and even a persuasiveness, in this very circumstance? As we recede from the golden glow of the early Gospel-time, when

miracles were wrought by Christ Himself in person, and by those to whom His personal presence was familiarly known, is it not almost to be expected that we should gradually enter into "the light of common day?" But further, as to the *fact* of miraculous working on the part of St. Paul, this is attested by passages in his own Epistles quite as explicit and numerous as is consistent with their main purpose of giving instruction in Christian doctrine and Christian duty.

Three important confirmations of this statement may be adduced from Epistles written at different times and in different places.

St. Paul, in writing to the Romans, and while strictly and scrupulously confining himself to what had occurred within the range of his own personal exertions, speaks of what "*Christ had wrought by him,*" and makes special mention of "*mighty signs and wonders by the power of the Spirit of God,*" as having attended his preaching of the Gospel over the whole region from Jerusalem to Illyricum. Again in the Second Epistle to the Corinthians, much of which is occupied

with apologetic arguments against his adversaries—while he evidently prefers to urge his Apostolic claims on the ground of his sufferings, his labours, his persecutions, his patience, his sympathy—still he makes the most unequivocal assertion of having worked miracles at Corinth: “Truly the signs of an Apostle were wrought among you, in *signs and wonders and mighty deeds.*” In such respects he declares that the Corinthians were not inferior to other Churches, and he himself “in nothing behind the very chiefest Apostles.” Two such passages as these evidently supply the statement which we seek, for a very large part of St. Paul’s missionary work in various places.

And now, thirdly, the Epistle to the Galatians furnishes us with another passage which is none the less forcible because the assertion that it contains occurs incidentally in the course of an argument on a different subject. The Apostle is expostulating with his converts in Galatia on the tendency they had manifested to fall back from pure Christianity into a corrupt mixture of Christianity and Judaism; and he exclaims, “He that minis-



tereth to you *the Spirit*, and worketh *miracles* among you, doeth he it by the works of the law, or by the hearing of *faith*?"—a sentence in regard to which, for our present purpose, three points deserve very careful attention. This "ministering of the Spirit," this "working of miracles," is spoken of not as something momentary, which occurred once for all and then ceased, but as something continuous or at least frequent: again, the whole power, by which such results were accomplished, is not claimed by St. Paul for himself, but attributed to the Lord whom he served; and finally the state of mind through which these blessings were received is that same spiritual attitude of Faith, which in the case of the Gospel miracles we have seen to be their accompaniment and condition.

But now, this last passage leads to the remark that the one great and pervading miracle which we are invited to contemplate in the Churches founded by St. Paul, is the preternatural power of the Holy Ghost, and that this, too, is to be viewed as the miracle of Christ. This is indeed true even of that part of the Apostolic history which is chiefly

concerned with St. Peter, as we perceive on a careful consideration of the events connected with Pentecost and with the conversion of Cornelius. But in St. Paul's case it is pre-eminently true that our attention is far less called to the healing of the sick and the removal of bodily infirmity than to the outpouring of the Spirit and the diffusion and active exercise of His manifold gifts and graces. And herein we are reminded that though Christ, after His Ascension, continued to work miracles even as He "began," yet the continuance of the miraculous working was in a higher form than the beginning. "Greater works than these shall ye do, because I go to the Father," was His own prophetic saying.

The more carefully we weigh this whole subject, the more we perceive the coherence and harmony of all that we read concerning Christ in all parts of the New Testament. We are even carried back in thought to His baptism, when it was said of Him, on the banks of Jordan, "Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining on him, the same is he which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost." It has been truly and forcibly

said of that moment, that it was an epoch of the greatest possible importance; for it “seems to mark the precise commencement of the administration of the Holy Spirit for the restoration of mankind: the visible descent of this dove not only designated, but empowered also, the Man Christ Jesus to be in all time to His Church the one and single Source through whom the Holy Spirit should pass in an orderly and covenanted way for the sanctification and the salvation of men.”

And if these thoughts carry us backward to the very beginning of our Lord's earthly ministry, they carry us onward through all Church-history and fit in easily with the characteristics of the times in which we are now living. It is in this way, perhaps, that we are best enabled to see the Miracles, not in their contrast with, but in their connection with, our present experience. In that great list, which, in the first Epistle to the Corinthians, St. Paul furnishes of spiritual powers in their variety and their unity, no very sharp line is drawn between “gifts of healing, working of miracles, divers kinds of tongues,” on the one hand, and “wisdom, knowledge, faith,”

on the other : and we are told that all these diversities of gifts and differences of ministry are "worked by one and the selfsame Spirit dividing to every man severally as he will."

This should lead us to remember—without any disposition to explain away the miraculous, and while fully recognising the supernatural circumstances connected with the first outburst of Christianity—yet that those gifts and graces which enable us to honour God, and to be useful to men, are the fruit of the Holy Spirit, and come from Christ. The working of the highest of all the Miracles is still within our reach. And more than this: all our ordinary powers—what we call our talents—our capacity for learning—our capacity for serving others—all are to be referred to their true centre and source in Christ. This will not lower our view of Him, but, on the contrary, it will raise us up from that poor unworthy level of self-satisfaction and self-confidence which leads us to forget that He is "the Author and Giver of all good things."

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